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The Cut Flower QUARTERLY

Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers Inc.

for growers of field and greenhouse specialty cuts

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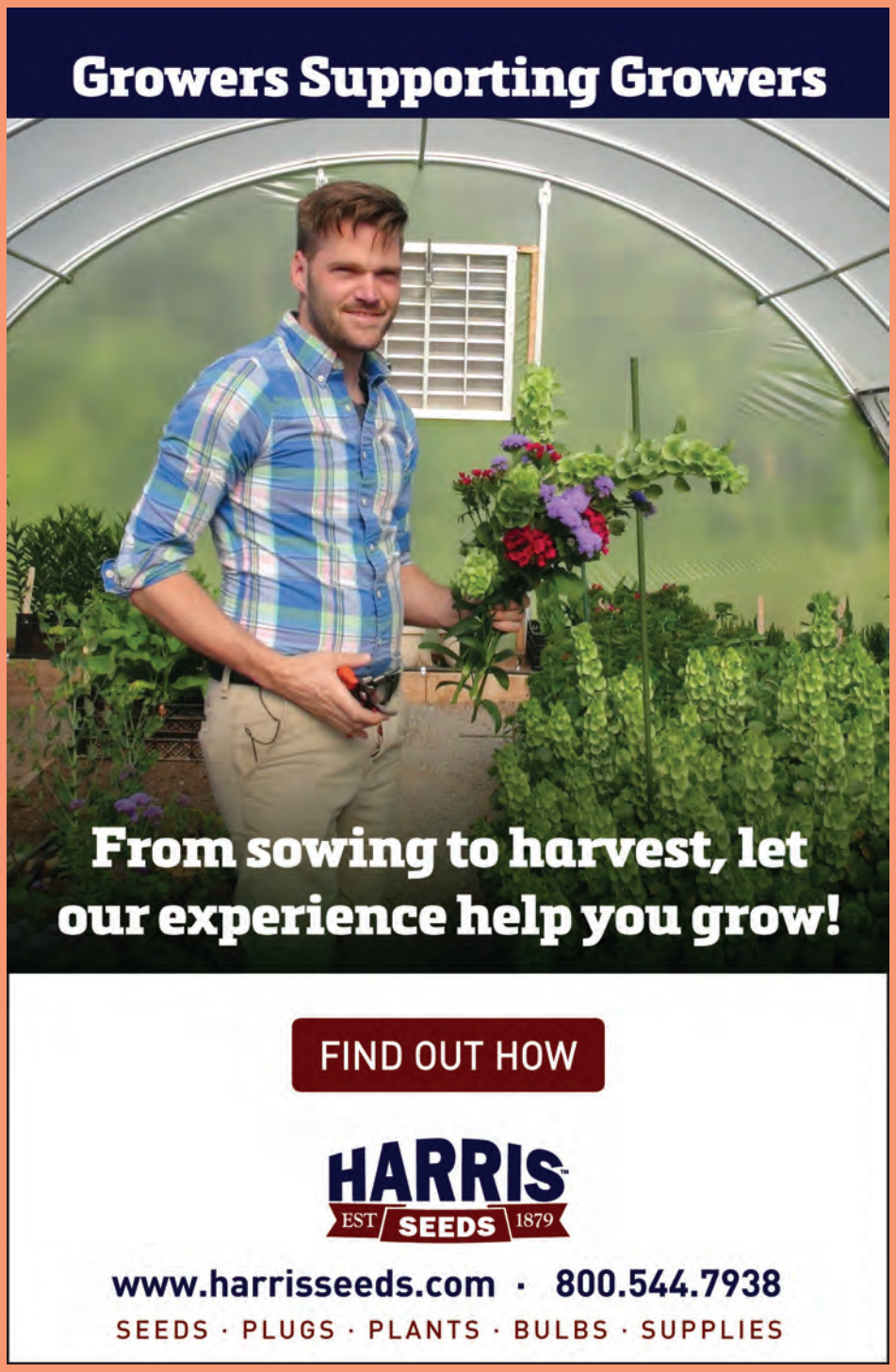
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From the PRESIDENT

Time Flies Like an Arrow; Fruit Flies Like a Banana

Dave Dowling

Time flies when you're having fun. How many time have you heard that line? It almost always applies to vacation breaks, days off, and good parties. It's also often heard in a sarcastic tone when time doesn't fly, and it seems to drag on forever. Like when you're pulling weeds all day, or transplanting for hours and hours, or packing up after a rained-out farmers' market, or picking your fiftieth bucket of flowers *before* 9:00 a.m. Or like now, when some growers are wishing for an early frost because, well, they're just plain worn out from a long growing season.

Time flies when you're having fun, is what I thought when I added up all the columns I had written for this publication. And I mean it in the "Vacation can't be over yet!" kind of way. I've written 45 columns so far. I think. I think because I no longer have my original files to double check. I've gone through five computers since writing my first column as Mid-Atlantic Regional Director way back in January of 2002. And I've never been good at transferring files to a new computer. But the old columns are available in the Members Only section of the web site, in case you get bored on a cold winter's night, and have already read all your cut flower books and seed catalogs. I have four more columns to write for 2018, then it will be someone else's turn in the Oval Office as President of this organization. More about that later…

In my writings, I try to act as a cheerleader and advisor, giving encouragement and advice to growers, both new and old, to help them create successful businesses. I also remind people that flower farming isn't a walk in the park. It's a job. It's a career. It's hard work. It's fighting the weather. It's long hours. It's rewarding. It's always changing. I've heard growers say, when asked how the season went, "Well, I made enough money to do it again next year.", or "I made it another year." I think most growers are optimists. They have to be. They put that little seed in the ground and *just know* that it's going to grow, and bloom, and help pay the bills. And they do it over, and over, and over, and over, week after week, year, after year. (That's why it's called succession planting.) And that makes for a successful farm. Optimism, dedication, hard work, experience, and a dose of good luck and good weather can go a long way in this business.

I also remind people that flower farming isn't a walk in the park. It's a job. It's a career. It's hard work. It's fighting the weather. It's long hours. It's rewarding. It's always changing. I've heard growers say, when asked how the season went, "Well, I made enough money to do it again next year.", or "I made it another year." I think most growers are optimists.

On the subject of succession planning. Yes, *planning*, not planting. Our members with established businesses should plan to attend the Seasoned Growers Meeting scheduled for March 12 & 13 in New Orleans. This meeting is all about the business side of flower farming. You already know how to grow flowers. Here is where you'll learn about growing and managing your business, increasing your profitability, and creating something of value that can be passed on to the next generation, or be used to fund your retirement years. This event isn't for beginners or members with just a couple years in the tractor seat. It is intended for established, medium, and larger-sized farms. More information can be found on the web site under the *ASCFG Events* tab at the top the home page.

What do we have for the new members? Another year of ASCFG Growers' Schools. These meetings cover the basics of operating a cut flower farm. There will be a one-day Growers' School in Oberlin, Ohio on Tuesday February 20th, with a get-together the evening before. Many of the same sessions will be held again in the fall on Monday, September 23rd in conjunction with the 30th Anniversary National Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina. Check the ASCFG Events tab on the web site for more information.

Now, more about this Oval Office gig. We're on the hunt for members to run for ASCFG President in 2018, for a three-year term starting in 2019. A couple qualifications and requirements must be met. The only "requirement" is that the President must have been an ASCFG Board Member in the past. So, if you were previously on the ASCFG Board, please raise your hand. Wow, 124 of you. That's a lot of possible candidates.

Everyone else can stop reading this column. I'm talking just to the past Board members now.

Presidential Qualifications: Candidates need to have some time available for communication with the home office and with members. This usually nothing more than a few emails a month, and the occa-

sional phone call, unless a special project is underway that takes more communication. You'll likely be contacted by a writer or two for a story about cut flowers for a magazine or newspaper, usually around Valentine's Day. It's easy to answer a few questions and give some insight into the cut flower world. It's also kind of fun to show your family and friends when you've been quoted in the *New York Times, Better Homes & Gardens*, etc.

You'll need to help organize and preside over two Board meeting a year. These are scheduled in the "off" season so you won't have to be away from your farm when you should be home planting or picking. You may be asked by other groups to speak at cut flower meetings in your area, or across the country. As a previous Board member, you know that it's up to you if you want to do a presentation at a meeting, but I found it a great way to travel and meet growers around the country. You'll be expected to attend the National Conference, and other ASCFG meetings if possible. You will help choose locations for future Conferences and meetings, and of course, you'll need to write this column every three months. Now, raise your hand again if you want to run for President.

For those of you still reading who have not yet served on the ASCFG Board, the only way you can qualify to be President of this amazing group of cut flower growers is to first be on the Board as a Regional Director, Secretary, or Vice President. So, plan your future, and run for one of these other offices when available, so that you can then run for the Presidential term that starts in 2022. But do it soon, because remember, *time flies when you're having fun!*

Dave Dowling is a Sales Representative and Product Manager for Ednie Flower Bulb, a division of Fred C. Gloeckner Co., Inc. Contact him at dave@ednieflowerbulb.com

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CHRONICLE BOOKS

Rebecca Perry, Sabatia Flower Farm

In the winter of 2007, I came across a copy of *The Cut Flower Quarterly* at a friend's house, the cover having caught my eye—a beautiful photo of white delphinium. I eagerly read the entire edition, discovering it was dedicated to what I had long fantasized about: growing and selling cut flowers.

It was an exciting discovery, a terrific magazine, and was the catalyst for my joining the ASCFG. The ten years since then have been exciting for me, as I have been able to fulfill that fantasy and now am a flower farmer on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Of course, in my original fantasy, flower farming was going to happen in the future, when I was retired. While not yet retired, I've learned many lessons along the way. I would like to share with you how our honor system roadside flower carts have become a significant part of the success of our business.

Some Experience, But More is Always Better

I certainly did not start flower farming without experience; in fact, I have been working in the horticulture industry for thirty-seven years. When I came across the ASCFG, I had been running a successful fine gardening firm on Cape Cod for sixteen years. We had been growing bedding plants and perennials in several greenhouses I owned, so I was well versed in growing in that environment. We grew material only to plant in our clients' gardens, no retail. We cut and arranged the gardens' harvest for several clients, and I had produced several weddings for friends and family. I was confident that doing events was not a direction I would expand into.

When I joined the ASCFG, I took advantage of the experience of my newly discovered colleagues. I read Bulletin Board posts, Quarterlys, and learned with excitement about members gathering at national meetings for farm tours, educational sessions, and growers' schools. I kept thinking about my dream of flower farming. I was interested in growing lilies, because land on Cape Cod is expensive and hard to find, so using my greenhouses for growing seemed like a good fit. My intention was to sell only wholesale to local florists. I began with a crate or two of lilies, grew and sold the stems, and the next year I ordered a few more crates. I knew I was ready to move forward and that's when I started attending regional and national meetings of the ASCFG.

At my first National Conference, the single most important thing I heard was the advice from Dave Dowling: "Don't grow anything until you know who you are going to sell it to."

I, as I suspect is true of most of the ASCFG membership, had no formal education in business, but I had founded and developed a very successful landscape maintenance and gardening company and was not intimidated by structures and equipment.

We have farmers' markets here on the Cape and we have dabbled in attending them, with mixed results. The sales figures are consistently a disappointment, especially with the costs associated and all the preparations needed to get to that market. While the promise of exposure is exciting, the farmers' markets have just been a dud for us.

However, I was already maxed out with running that company and the demanding schedule that goes along with a dozen employees and 70-90 accounts. I was developing a whole new enterprise and while I had a plan of who I would sell to (florists), the reality was I needed more help. That help came in the form of the secret weapon already on my payroll. Sandy Fitzgerald, who has a background in marketing, is an incredibly organized and tireless workhorse who back then was employed only part-time in the office doing the bookkeeping. Always eager to learn more about all aspects of my business, Sandy observed and supported me from a distance through my first couple of plantings of lilies.

I easily found buyers for the few hundred stems produced each of the first few years of dabbling. In 2011, I attended the National Conference in Reston, Virginia, and it was there that I caught the serious bug. Energized and excited, I was able to get Sandy enthused about some expansion. With her support, we immediately placed a larger order of lilies to plant that winter in one of our greenhouses.

By the time that first lily harvest was expected in late winter 2012, Sandy had jumped in and taken charge of plantings, sales, and marketing; we had visited local florists with a promise of local product, held an open house attended by a few interested buyers, and had what we thought was a good plan to sell our lilies and peonies. Late in the fall of 2013, with the help of the USDA Farm Ownership Program, I purchased a little over four acres several miles away from my business' home base on one of the busiest roads in the area, our second farm location was born.

You Take the High Road, I'll Take the Back Road

We are now in our fourth season growing cuts in that field in large enough numbers to produce thousands of mixed field flower bunches mid-June through October after our ranunculus, daffodil, and tulip harvests have slowed to a crawl, and have constructed a respectable greenhouse from which we can harvest our lily crops Easter through Thanksgiving.

Our first farm location is on a busy *back* road. This is important, because as in most resort areas, locals on Cape Cod learn to get where they need to go by using back roads and shortcuts to avoid the inevitable heavy backups and difficult left-hand turns that are the curse of living and driving in a tourist area. We have a respectable year-round population and we are home to a large number of retirees—snowbirds who summer on the Cape and winter in the South. Summer traffic is a challenge.

On my busy road—the main route taken by a large segment of our population to get to Hyannis, the "city" on Cape Cod—some 15,000 cars can pass by my driveway on any given summer day. Back in 2013, within a half mile of my driveway, there were two seasonal flower carts each putting out three to five bunches each day, both with a five dollar price point.

I was happy selling flowers to our local florists, and I know that doing events was not a direction for me, my gardening clients being my first obligation. We have farmers' markets here on the Cape and we have dabbled in attending them, with mixed results. The sales figures are consistently a disappointment, especially

with the costs associated and all the preparations needed to get to that market. While the promise of exposure is exciting, the farmers' markets have just been a dud for us. But one day, toward the end of the summer months of 2012, Sandy put our two-wheeled garden cart out on the dirt area at the end of my driveway with a few bunches of surplus lilies in a bucket, a "Five dollars per bunch" sign (so as not to exceed the other local sellers), and a small cash box. Those lilies sold quickly that day, so she tried again the next day. As the week wore on and each day the flowers sold easily and the cash box was full, it became clear that this system was a hit. We had a winning location along with a clientele who were proving to be honest as well as consistent.

Since that first real year of growing, we've made regular weekly or twice weekly deliveries to local florists who have become addicted to our lilies. Along with the lilies, we began harvesting sunflowers, dahlias, and assorted annual and perennial cuts, we gladly added those items to our deliveries providing local-grown product to these busy florists. But those first weeks and months of putting bunches out on the side of the road for people to police themselves and leave money in the cash box was a winning sales tool for us, and has now five years later has proven to be the main source of revenue for our farm.

Our flower carts are open daylight hours, seven days a week, from about March 15 through Thanksgiving, when the temperatures are above freezing. We have big days like Easter weekend and Mother's Day weekend, but the arrival of the summer residents and tourists who are renting for a week or a month keep our daily sales consistent through the entire summer. Our regulars keep coming daily during the shoulder seasons.

We have from the beginning produced and sold Oriental and OT hybrid lilies wholesale. These are grown strictly in our heated greenhouse so we can control disease issues. Our florists are addicted to the superior quality and the wide variety we offer.

The same has been the case with our honor system flower cart clientele. We have developed a loyal following of people who adore our lilies! Every morning before 8:00, we put out 15 or 20 two-stem premade bunches of lilies. Our current price is eight dollars per bunch, we're getting $4.00 per stem for these lilies, ($1.30 per bud). As of mid-August this season we had sold over 2500 of those two-stem bunches at the two carts. We have found little demand for floral design services, and encourage people to fill their special orders with mixed bunches from the stands.

Our daily routine, like most of our fellow growers, is to harvest our field of annuals and perennials daily. We condition that harvest and then make mixed field-grown flower bunches from that day's harvest, which will go out on the stand the following morning. We harvest our lilies daily, and twice a week make bunches for the cart so we can easily restock as needed. What we do not do is put out anything that's left over, or on the way to the compost pile. Sandy, who continues to run the day-to-day operation, has eagle eyes and is a stickler for quality. We stock the carts with only first quality flowers. We spend twenty minutes in the morning putting fresh water in jars, and moving buckets of flowers from our coolers to the stands, and ten minutes at the end of the day putting the day's leftovers back into the coolers. There are no tents to erect, no trucks to pack, few staffing expenses.

Honor Systems on Trial

Since joining the ASCFG, it has become clear to me that there is not one magic marketing strategy employed by the membership. Some of you are floral and wedding designers and grow your cuts primarily for that market. Some of you are doing CSA and farmers' markets, many of you sell wholesale to florists, many sell to groceries large and small, and a number of the membership have self-service honor system flower stands. Many do all of the above or at a minimum several of those methods.

We all live in distinctly unique areas and each has challenges associated with marketing of crops. Not everyone lives on a road suitable for an honor system cart. But for those of you who do want to use an honor system for your flowers, I am glad to share some lessons learned and encourage those of you who live in appropriate areas to persevere and try this method of sales.

Over the past five months, more than $40,000 has passed through our two cash boxes. While it is devastating to discover that we have been shorted by $1460 this year so far, the discovery that we are likewise overpaid by $1425 is enlightening. I consider that a big win.

I reached out to the membership through Facebook earlier this summer to get a feeling for who might be using the honor system and how it is working for them. The few who responded are almost all in rural areas or on roads adjacent to recreation areas and have only a small percentage of their sales from these carts. Some offer honor system "pick your own" as well as those who just offer pre-made bunches or surplus from markets or wholesale deliveries.

All respondents agreed that theft was a big issue. Most use cameras to discourage theft, with mixed results. We also now use cameras. We have been able to identify people who are taking bunches; we even identified our largest, most methodical thief who turned out to be a florist a few towns over. Our trail cameras work extremely well, taking clear pictures of faces and license plates, and even showing the denomination of money going in the box. We have shared pictures of thieves on Facebook and within hours have been able to identify someone we are looking for. However, it takes hours and hours to look through those pictures to identify the one suspect, who many times denies it, and although the theft ends, no one is paying for all the time looking through pictures. It may be that our past vigilance has helped, but with a better record-keeping system this year, we had a big surprise.

A Surprising Discovery

We have always been methodical about keeping track of the product that goes out, and what comes in at the end of the day. We have in the past focused only on the shortages at the end of the day, but now record when we have *extra* cash at the end of the day as well. We have been delighted to discover that while we are often short, we are also sometimes way over. One day someone might be short of cash and leave a few dollars less than their purchase, but on those same days, someone has only a twenty and leaves the extra to recoup on a later visit.

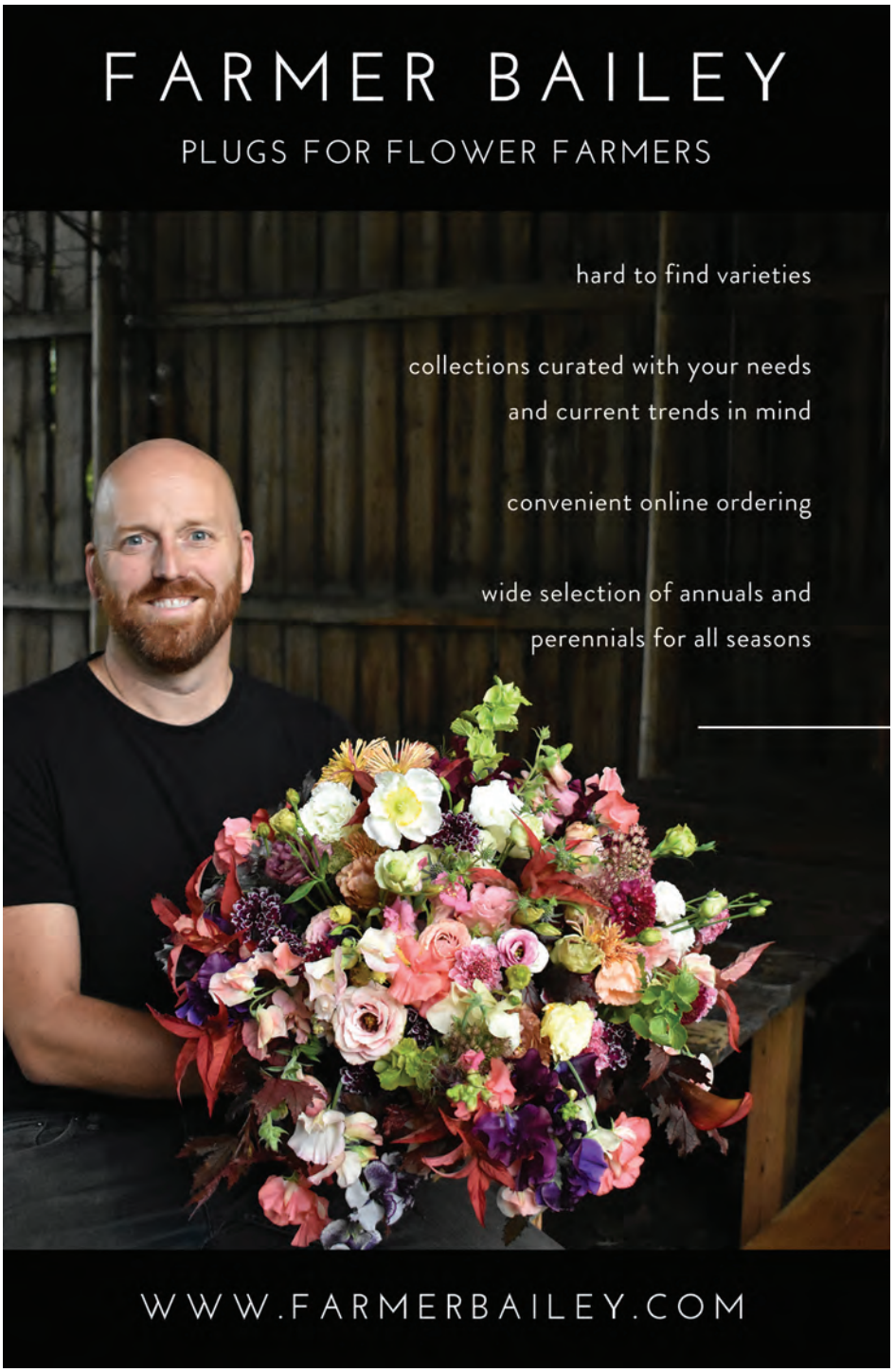
Over the past five months, more than $40,000 has passed through our two cash boxes. While it is devastating to discover that we have been shorted by $1460 this year so far, the discovery that we are likewise overpaid by $1425 is enlightening. I consider that a big win. We are no longer spending precious time looking through pictures on the cameras trying to identify the culprits of theft. We now have a new attitude and renewed excitement about this aspect of our sales.

Now six seasons into our experience with the honor system, we increased our bunch prices in 2017 from five and ten dollar price points to one single eight-dollar item. Since we started this cart, one of the two neighboring carts has disappeared and the second has more limited availability (cutting back due to excessive theft). We have found that we have a very regular clientele, but almost daily someone who has never stopped before does for the first time.

Our customers are in love with the selection, and price does not seem to be their main reason for their frequenting our carts. Sure, once in a while someone needs special attention and interrupts our busy crew, but it almost always results in a large sale.

People are thrilled to be policing themselves and the enthusiasm for a little eight-dollar bunch of mixed cuts or a six-bud bunch of lilies is relayed to us daily by people who leave notes or we run into while restocking. And while the work is hard, I feel so fortunate that I didn't wait until retirement to become a flower farmer. To be able to bring the simple joy of flowers to so many is truly work worth doing. I count my blessings every day for the contribution and consistent never-say-die attitude I have in Sandy, and likewise am so appreciative of that day she put out the two-wheeled cart with a bucket of flowers. The flower cart honor system is a winning arrangement for us!

Rebecca Perry is owner of Sabatia Flower Farm in Centerville, Massachusetts. Contact her at sabatiaflowerfarm@comcast.net



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Brad and Shelly Brubaker, Little Creek Valley

Jodi Helmer

Bringing old-fashioned business sense to a growing venture

Brad and Shelly Brubaker were looking for opportunities to spend more time with their children. Farming, the couple believed, was the answer. But with only a quarter of an acre available for production, the Brubakers knew their focus needed to be on high-value crops. In 2011, they planted their first field of flowers.

"Flower farming captivated our interest and seemed like a fun challenge," Shelly recalls. "With such a small space, we had to till up our yard and use very intense production methods to grow as many flowers as we could."

The first season, their farm, Little Creek Valley in West Manchester, Ohio, grew 25 varieties of cut flowers, selling them to local florists and via two weekly markets. Though demand was strong, the learning curve was steep: With no flower farming experience, the couple relied on photos and descriptions in seed catalogs with no idea whether their picks would resonate with customers. Shelly recalls, "Every year, we try new things that either become new favorites or give us something to laugh about."

Intrigued by the colors and offbeat shape of Mexican hat (*Ratibida columnifera*), the couple planted it but struggled to sell it, explaining that the flowers were too fragile. After one season, Little Creek Valley retired Mexican hat from its fields.

"If we took the time to grow something, we always try to sell it," Shelly says. "It always goes on the truck, sometimes for weeks at a time; we never give up as long as we still have it available."

Nevertheless, They Persisted

The Brubakers showed the same persistence when it came to developing relationships with customers. Without high-tech tools such as a website, social media accounts or email to market their flowers—a decision made for religious reasons—the couple took an old-fashioned approach to promoting their flowers.

"We knew we'd have to put a lot of effort into marketing," Shelly recalls. "We loaded our van with flowers and started going to visit florists; we'd show up at the same time every week and we knew if we could get them out to the van to see our products, they hardly ever closed the doors without buying something."

Shelly acknowledges that operating a cut flower farm without some of the high-tech tools most growers take for granted does require a little extra effort. Instead of buying seeds or bulbs online, she orders through catalogs; without a smart phone to accept Square or PayPal payments, customers must write checks to her.

"It wasn't like we went backwards," Shelly explains. "Since we've never had the Internet, it's not like I think 'Oh, bummer, I used to be able to order online and now I can't do that.' We're used to picking up the phone and making calls, or going to visit people"

In fact, forming personal relationships rather than connecting via social media is a cornerstone of the business model at Little Creek Valley.

Stopping in to visit florists and make deliveries helped the Brubakers develop personal relationships with their customers. Shelly calls florists each week to tell them what's available and accepts orders over the phone—though most florists prefer to "shop" from the back of the van.

Without a blog or social media, Shelly remains in contact with customers via a printed newsletter that's sent via snail mail (or hand delivered).

Recognizing that some businesses might struggle without the ability to conduct certain transactions such as sending electronic invoices, their church partnered with a private company that provides email services (without Internet connections), allowing Little Creek Valley to get its first email address. Although the Brubakers can email catalog order forms, email invoices, and send e-newsletters, Shelly believes florists prefer face-to-face visits and printed newsletters, explaining, "They seem to really appreciate the fact that we're stilling to spend time talking with them and getting to know them. It feels more personal.

"Not having social media has blessed us rather than hindered us because we have personal connections to all of our customers that we wouldn't have if we were all paperless and wireless," she adds.

The regular personal interactions also taught the couple an important lesson about their market: Most florists lack understanding about the benefits of local blooms. In the beginning, Brad and Shelly spent a lot of time explaining that local flowers are fresher and will hold up longer and, unlike imported flowers sometimes doused in chemicals to survive the long journey from field to market, Little Creek Valley focuses on farming sustainably.

A Blooming Success

The old-fashioned marketing efforts have paid off. By the third growing season, Little Creek Valley's customer base blossomed alongside their flower fields and Brad was able to quit his job to grow flowers full-time.

Little Creek Valley sells flowers to 25 florists in Ohio and Indiana. Demand for their flowers allowed the Brubakers to move to a new, larger, farm with more growing space. The couple now grows 50 different varieties of fresh cut flowers, including ranunculus, delphinium, sweet William, salvia, larkspur, amaranthus, rudbeckia, foxglove, peonies, and zinnias.

In addition to the one-and-a-half-acres of field production, the farm relies on a greenhouse and two hoophouses to extend the growing season. The new farm, with its 1800s farmhouse and red bank barn, is located near an interstate,

We knew we'd have to put a lot of effort into marketing. We loaded our van with flowers and started going to visit florists; we'd show up at the same time every week and we knew if we could get them out to the van to see our products, they hardly ever closed the doors without buying something.

making it more accessible to visitors than their previous rural location. Last season, the Brubakers started hosting farm tours, offering classes, and selling buckets of fresh flowers for events, opening up new possibilities for the farm.

"Being here is allowing us to fulfill one of our visions for the farm of connecting with our community," Shelly says.

The farm is also helping the couple deepen other connections.

Little Creek Valley is a true family farm. The Brubakers have five children ranging in age from four to 12 and each has his or her own role on the farm, from pulling weeds and harvesting flowers to bundling bouquets and helping with deliveries.

"We make a great team and that interaction we have as a family is precious," says Shelly. "Farming also keeps us all in close connection with God. He is the provider of our strength and wisdom and we are so blessed that He has allowed us to have this farm and grow these beautiful flowers."

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Is the Emphasis on Local Flowers Making a Difference?

Gay Smith

A follow-up on Gay's findings from 2014

How significant is the impact of the local flower movement? Is "local" influencing purchases at the wholesale level? Are brides interested in the origin of their blooms? Do retailers specifically request locally-grown product or does price undermine origin? A sleeve sporting an American Grown sticker implies that 80% of the bouquet components are U.S.-grown. Does that label satisfy curious minds or do customers ask for more details? Debra Prinzing has been promoting the importance of local flowers and her *Slow Flowers* (2013) book for several years.

The introduction explains what *Slow Flowers* means, "A *concept…about the artisanal, anti-mass-market approach to celebrations, festivities and floral gifts of love. I value my local sources...I want to know where the flowers and greenery were grown, and who grew them. Having a relationship with the grower who planted and nurtured each flower is nothing short of magical."*

For the purpose of this article, "hyper-local" describes flowers grown within 100 miles of sale point, and "local" as anything grown in the U.S. Interesting to note that my Seattle contact informed me that flowers from British Columbia are not considered local in her area (fodder for another article about the power of brand awareness).

What are the indicators telling us if local flowers are grabbing consumers' attention? Have you noticed photo placards in produce and floral supermarkets celebrating local suppliers? The popularity of hands-on floral workshops offered around the country continues to delight many. Don't discount the almost three-fold membership increase in the ASCFG since 2008, indicating that the demand for local blooms exists—within and outside the traditional grower/wholesaler/retailer trajectory. It was a delight to find Floret Farm's book *Cut Flower Garden* book at Costco. The popularity of the American Grown Field to Vase dinner events is another barometer—sellout crowds at every function so far this year. According to the American Grown web site, "Certified American Grown is the largest consumer-facing brand in the floral industry, communicating the importance of origin and buying American Grown Flowers."

The desire to differentiate local vs. imported flowers heralded an uptick in certification programs in the 1990s: Florverde, Rain Forest, Veriflora, BASC, MPS, and GLOBALG.A.P. to name a few. These programs emphasize environmental sustainability, land stewardship, and social programs. BloomCheck is the certification program endorsed by the California Cut Flower Commission (CCFC) for American Grown. Product origin distinguishes BloomCheck from other certification programs. It is specific and open to all U.S. flower farmers.

To better understand the impact of local blooms, I tapped a few industry friends, including a San Francisco market wholesaler, a California grower, a wire service rep/former wholesale manager, a wholesale manager in the Southwest, and a mass-market sales lead for a national wholesale chain. Here are some questions and answers about the traction this local movement is making on our flower purchases.

1. Do customers ask if your offerings are locally grown or imported? Do they care?

California grower: Customers buy our flowers because we grow the flowers. Everyone wants to buy from the source. Our buy/sell (3rd party products) is a service for customers but accounts for around 30% of our sales.

San Francisco wholesaler: Interesting question. With all of the "California Grown" and "USA Grown" labels on sleeves, much of our product is marked. We have a few select buyers who will ask if it's "local" or "imported" but I cannot honestly say they are asking for quality and location versus price. I think our market is more focused on unique and what they need for their work to stand out.

Wire service representative: In my experience, they are either all in or don't care at all. A few make it a core business value and market that way. Others use when convenient, and competitively priced. Those to whom it matters use it to differentiate their businesses, and are good at selling the idea and romance of it.

Mass-market sales lead for national wholesale chain: Customers at my level are highly interested in local flowers. I usually offer them before they can ask. It is a great selling point for me**.**

Southwest wholesaler: Customers are interested in local, but we carry products from all over the world, so "Where's it from?" is a frequent question for everything.

2. Are end consumers interested in local?

California grower: Local flower gross profit fluctuates because costs are not as easy to control, and you cannot turn off production when the market slows down. (The customer) knowing you are the grower is more important than a "local" or other label. We push Northern California grown in the San Francisco market area.

Mass-market sales lead for national wholesale chain: We always use "locally" grown as a sales feature, and yes, sometimes, you can get more money for local product. Unfortunately, we cannot call British Columbian-grown product "local". I've tried this with many supermarket customers, and it's always a reluctant "no". The "locally grown" determination seems to be within 500 miles, and within the United States.

Southwest wholesaler: For us, local includes anything grown in California, Oregon, and Washington, as well as hyper-local growers within 80 miles of our location.

San Francisco wholesaler: Well, yes, we do add "local" and "import" but it's more so that our clients are aware of what to expect and where the product is coming from. I think that "local" is such a broad word these days. There are so many small novelty growers selling directly to florists at a very high price that our wholesale prices don't seem high. And they will pay more for an item that's well grown, limited, and local.

Wire service representative: Yes it was always a part of the spiel at the wholesale house I managed, but more from a quality standpoint. Most local product came to us with their feet in water and never spent time in a box. Also, I draw a distinction between Canadian product and grower direct product, because of the more market driven way it's sold. Peak season prices always fell on the auction, I don't see that happening with the Seattle Wholesale Growers Market, for example.

3. Does "local" bring better prices?

California grower: Knowing you are the grower is more important than local.

San Francisco wholesaler: For us, the interesting thing is that yes, people will pay a bit more for local if they know the farm (brand awareness). We have a local gal who grows organic out of Sunol. People won't flinch at a $6.50 or $7.50 celosia from her. If asked that for a field grown out of Watsonville? They'd not pay it. For our event clientele, it's about availability, but for the few brick and mortar (florists) we have it can be a price. But they will also purchase a $39 gloriosa from Japan over a Dutch one.

Southwest wholesaler: We mention it and sometimes can get more money for local, but it can be risky because many local growers are weak with their postharvest handling, so longevity is often inconsistent.

4. Are your customers aware of Debra Prinzing's "Slow" movement? Is it a stimulus or a reason for buying? Are you seeing traction that relates to her efforts?

California grower: I am aware of her movement, but I am not sure our customers are. Traditional wholesalers don't care.

Mass-market sales lead for national wholesale chain: Don't know who Debra Prinzing is, sorry; I probably should, though.

San Francisco wholesaler: Have you met our clients? No, she does not have an impact on our clients. In fact, some say she can work with the whole "slow flowers" because she isn't working with brides who want what they want, and corporate accounts that need certain looks and don't care where the product is from. I do think she has encouraged small growers and we've seen an increase in competition from them during the summer months.

Southwest wholesaler: Some know who Debra is, but I'm not sure how big the Slow Flowers movement is in this area.

Wire service representative: I would bet that 2 out of 10 retail florists know about her. They are just not keyed into that. Younger studio or wedding and event designers who read blogs and are more focused on social media, yes—they know about her. These are the same folks who can sell the romance of local farms in their designs.

5. Do your procurement people ask growers about flower prep (postharvest logistics)?

San Francisco wholesaler: No.

Wire service representative: Can't speak to that for anyone but myself, and yes. I always was pushing for growers to adhere to postharvest best practices. Some viewed it as an unnecessary expense.

6. Do you think local flower production will survive the conversion to and interest in cannabis (from an economical point of view)?

California grower: There is only one cut flower grower left in Salinas, Green Valley. The rest were grateful to sell their falling-down greenhouses to some silly cannabis investor with a lot of money; most flower growers in Salinas were looking for an exit strategy from greenhouses and growing flowers. This gave them the opportunity to cash out. However, San Diego flower growers are expanding. Cannabis only accelerates what is already happening.

7. Do local flowers last as well as imported?

Mass-market sales lead for national wholesale chain: In general, local flowers don't last as long as imported. A lot of the locally-grown products are field flowers.

San Francisco wholesaler: Depends on the flower. And it's 50/50 as to one lasting more than the other.

Wire service representative: Depends. In the case of tender things like sweet peas and dahlias, local definitely lasts as well as imported. Local growers here tend to cut in a more advanced stage because they don't have to worry about shipping so it's ultimately a wash on longevity.

Southwest wholesaler: No. Most of our hyper-local growers don't treat blooms after harvest—they rely on the fast turnaround from harvest to wholesale, but without postharvest treatment or good temperature management, vase life suffers.

THE TAKEAWAY

- Yes, local flowers are making a difference, albeit appreciation varies considerably depending on your location in the country.
- The uptick in small growers adds some negative price pressure on growers during production peaks (laws of supply and demand).
- Brand awareness, more than where flowers are grown, seems the key to strong prices.
- Confusion exists concerning whether postharvest efforts are an expense or an insurance policy.
- Debra Prinzing and the ASCFG should continue sharing the message of local goodness to wholesalers and traditional florists. Encouraging flower awareness to the public (regardless of product origin) acts as a rising tide that lifts all boats.
- People love flowers and they love the story. These are the same folks who can sell the romance of local farms in their designs.

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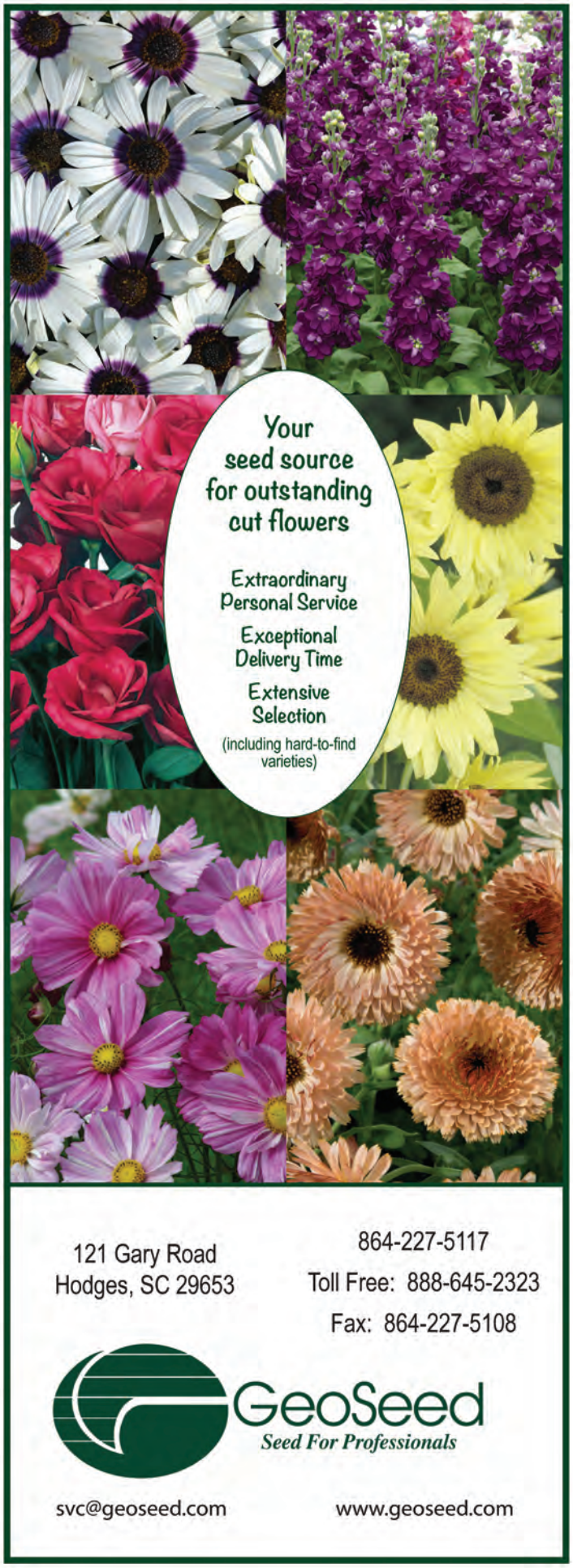

The Crop Gossip Edition: Why We Like Them, Why We Don't

Ellen Frost and Laura Beth Resnick

Zinnias

Ellen - The Florist: Zinnias are the quintessential summer flowers. Big blooms! Bright colors! In the last few years, the range of zinnias offered by our local growers has expanded considerably. Beyond Benary Giants, there are Oklahomas, Zinderellas, Zowies, Profusion, Persian Carpet, Lilliput, and so many more! Zinnias are great in CSA bouquets and other single-order bouquets. They really pack a punch. They also add a burst of summer color in centerpieces. For a focal flower, zinnias are relatively economical compared to lisianthus, dahlias, or even some sunflowers.

Zinnias can be challenging to use in wedding designs. Since their necks are hollow, they're prone to bending. Harvesting at the correct stage of growth, when the necks are strong (but the bloom hasn't aged) is definitely key from the grower's side. On the design side, wiring helps keep the heads in place for bridal bouquets. Additionally, vase life can be iffy. Experts say don't put zinnias in the cooler during conditioning. For wedding work, which typically begins several days in advance of the wedding date, zinnias that are in centerpieces must be put in the cooler. We have tried raising our cooler temperature to 49 to try minimizing the chilling effect of the cooler on these heat loving flowers. So far so good.

Laura Beth - The Farmer: We only grow Benarys (because they're big and powdery mildew resistant), 'Queen Red Lime' (because that COLOR!), and 'Oklahoma White' (because they're great producers and we always need white). We transplant from 128's at 9x9 spacing. Any closer and we run more of a risk of powdery mildew.

We had good vase life (six or so days) until this year, when we got some complaints from our CSA members. We quickly did some experiments to identify the problem. We discovered that it's true: zinnias have only a three- or four-day vase life if they're put in a cooler. Before this year, we didn't have a cooler, so our zinnias were just fine.

Now that we know, we're harvesting all zinnias the same day they are delivered to the buyer, so we don't have to store them overnight. We're using a Chrysal gerbera tablet in each bucket too, just in case. And, we sent an email to our members explaining the problem and promising extra full shares as thanks for their patience.

Some of our florists never buy zinnias, and some buy them every week. We use the majority in our CSA and for weddings. 'Queen Red Lime' is especially important for our wedding sales, as that blush color is always in demand. We plant three successions, which pretty much covers the summer and fall. When we bunch, we put 11 stems instead of 10 just in case a stem breaks in transit. The only other flower we do this with is marigolds, which also have more fragile stems.

If I had to make one recommendation when it comes to zinnias, it's to skip the small blooms and grow just Benarys. They go a long way for your farmers' market, florists, and for weddings, whereas the small blooms are more of an accent flower. Plus they're very resistant to pests and disease.

Dahlias

Ellen - The Florist: There is so much to love about dahlias. The best thing about them is how long they are available. This year we started getting dahlias in late May from PlantMasters in Montgomery County Maryland in zone 7b. They filled their new hoophouse with 6-8 of their favorite varieties (including 'Café au Lait', of course) in March, and eight weeks later the dahlias were ready to cut. These powerhouse focal flowers continued through the summer and all through the fall. In Baltimore City, where our zone is 7c (almost 8) we have microclimates that allow our city growers to continue producing dahlias long after frost has hit everyone else. Last year, we had dahlias late into December.

We also love that dahlias come in an endless number of colors, shapes, and sizes. As a designer, there is a dahlia for everything we need to design from boutonnieres ('Little Beeswing', 'White Aster') and floral crowns to bridal bouquets ('Café au Lait', 'Breakout', 'Belle of Barmera') and large centerpieces and ceremony arrangements.

Now don't get me wrong. Dahlias aren't perfect. They have their own set of issues just like most flowers. For design, dahlias can be tricky to use because many of them, including the much beloved 'Café au Lait', are flat and one-sided. This works great for front-facing bouquets and arrangements. However, for designs that must be seen from all sides, they can be difficult. When possible, we use ball dahlias in these situations. Our favorites right now are 'Cornel', 'Cornel Bronze', 'Jowie Winnie', 'Wizard of Oz', and 'Honey Dew'. We also wire dahlias to be able to manipulate their positioning in arrangements. Wiring forces the bloom to face up as opposed to out, which can be a little easier to use in designs.

Dahlias can often be on the short side. Stem length range from 8 inches to over 24 inches. With this much variation, it's critical for us to ask the growers about length before ordering. The worst is to be surprised by the stem length of the flower when you have plans for it being a certain height. If dahlia stems are short and we need them to be long, we can always put water picks on them and wire them into bouquets or arrangements.

Laura Beth - The Farmer: It's only our second year growing these mischievous plant devils, so keep that in mind as you read about our methods—we're probably making lots of mistakes. Feel free to let me know what we could do better!

We plant ours in early June, after the spring rain. Each hole gets a dose of feathermeal and chicken manure. We then put compost in each dahlia bed. We don't use landscape fabric or plastic; eventually the plants get bushy and don't need to be weeded.

If we had been on top of our game this year, we would have fertigated with fish emulsion once every few weeks for the remainder of the season. We use the Florida weave, a popular tomato trellising technique, to keep them upright. I see more and more farmers using the corral method (a double layer of twine on either side of the dahlia bed) and might try that instead next year! We definitely have some dahlias flopping over, even with three layers of twine.

We don't use bug bags on our dahlias, because it seems like the time I'd spend putting them on each bud negates the money I'd make from selling that flower. Instead, we simply deadhead any bug-bitten blooms as we harvest. It takes a while, but not as long as bug bags. We grow mostly ball type dahlias because they are less susceptible to bugs than dinnerplates.

In November, we dig tubers and store them in crates in our side porch, which never quite freezes. We haven't washed the tubers off in the past; we leave the dirt packed on them, just like you would if you were storing potatoes for the winter. We divide in the spring when they've started to sprout, so it's obvious where the eyes are.

Favorite varieties include 'Cornel Red' and 'Cornel Bronze', 'Natalie G', 'Jowie Winnie', and 'White Aster'.

Basil

Ellen - The Florist: Basil exudes the scent of summer. Like zinnias and dahlias, there are dozens of varieties to use for design including the popular 'African Blue', Thai, 'Cinnamon', 'Aramato', lemon, 'Opal', 'Cardinal', 'Pesto Perpetuo', and so many more. We love basil as a foliage in design because colors are so unique and varied. 'Opal' has purple leaves that are almost black, while 'Pesto Perpetuo' is bright green with variegated leaves. Of course the spicy scent also adds a unique element to any summer or fall arrangement.

Basil, like zinnias, are heat-loving plants. They don't like being in the cooler during their conditioning. But like zinnias, we have tried to minimize any negative effects on the flowers from the cold by raising the temps.

Laura Beth - The Farmer: We grow only 'African Blue', which is resistant to disease. We buy about 100 plugs from Hillcrest Nursery and then take cuttings all year. Cuttings go under our fluorescent shop lights for about two weeks to take root, then we move them out to the greenhouse. Basil does fine in our cooler over 42 degrees, but not below. We harvest the day before deliveries so it can hydrate all night.

Because basil shouldn't be used out of water, we never give it to brides and grooms unless they request it. In general, we give only the hardiest foliage to DIY wedding couples. Couples are often unfamiliar with flowers and foliage, including basil, so we try to help them out by giving them stuff that won't wilt. For example, goldenrod foliage, dusty miller, sage, and eucalyptus make great foliages for DIY couples. Basil, lemon verbena, and mint are more risky.

Basil is not one of my favorite foliages because it's too finicky. I prefer hardier foliage like eucalyptus and dusty miller. Lemon verbena and scented geranium are great too! But, basil is crowd pleasing and a great producer, so it's worth growing. We get at least two harvests from each plant throughout the summer and early fall.

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Bits and Pieces from Stanton

Stanton Gill

Using Vinegar as Weed Control? Read This

We received an interesting call from a nursery who had been visited by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) Pesticide Regulation division. The nursery was using off the shelf vinegar (8%) to control weeds. MDA cited the misuse of this material. The nursery manager contacted me with a copy of the 2005 EPA document that listed Active Ingredients Eligible for Minimum Risk Pesticide Products. The EPA listed active ingredients that are exempt, which included vinegar.

I asked Ed Crow, who used to be with MDA and is now the pesticide information educator in Pennsylvania, whether this product needed a label or not. Even though it is on the exemption list, a company must still register it with EPA if it is being used as pesticide. It would need an EPA registration number, directions for use, and safety information. Vinegar sold for human consumption is one thing, but when you start using it as herbicide it must be registered with EPA, and safety rules and precautions followed. In Maryland, all materials used as pesticides must be registered with the state chemist. You can visit the MDA website and see which materials are registered with the state chemist.

Fleischman Company has labeled a 20% vinegar with an EPA label and a Maryland State Chemist registration, and it is sold under the name Vinagreen Vinegar. The proper use directions on the label recommend wearing eye protection, and covering the skin since this is an acid material.

The takeaway: commercial growers, homeowners, and landscapers in any state cannot legally use grocery store vinegar to kill weeds, even though vinegar is exempted as an active ingredient.

Long-flowering Sunflower from Syngenta

At this summer's Cultivate trade show in Columbus, Ohio, Syngenta was showing off its new sunflower called 'Sunfinity'. The plants were loaded with blooms. They claim it will continue to flower through the summer into the fall. If this is so it would be an interesting small size sunflower for customers with sunny landscapes. The display plants certainly looked good. I obtained seed from Syngenta to trial this plant out for next spring. Besides looking good, I suspect it will be a good pollen source for pollinators. With its summer-long flower display all it could also prove to be a very good cut flower. Some of our Maryland greenhouse growers commented that it has very few leaves, and looks ugly in a pot. I called Will Healy of Ball Seed Company to get his comments. He said that when planted in a mass planting it looks great, and it does flower most of the summer. As cut flower growers why would you care if it has small foliage as long as the flower display is great for sales?

Bug Zappers Made Popular Again

The Zika virus problem is rising up again in South America and the press is picking up on the mosquitoes issue and how people should control them. Proctor and Gamble is releasing Zevo, an indoor trap for flying insects, including mosquitoes, gnats and moths. You plug it in like the electric room freshener devices that were so popular a couple of years ago. It emits a combination of UV and blue light that attracts insects, which get hung up on stick cartridges. They sell for under $15 and replacement cartridges are just under $6 each. The replaceable cartridge is supposed to last at least 45 days. It is attractive looking from the outside and the blue light it emits is rather pleasing. I am sure it will be a big hit but not sure how many actual mosquitoes it will catch, especially inside the typical house that keeps it doors and windows shut. *At press time, this product was sold out at zevoinsect.com*

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Charmelia

the new, long-lasting flower that's charming the U.S. market

Richard Lutes

Photo courtesy of J Schwanke.

All floral professionals are familiar with alstroemeria, but have you seen its stunning relative that is taking the industry by storm? 'Charmelia', meaning "charming beauty," is a new flower variety that features 20 blooms per stem and a long-lasting vase life.

With its many branches, Charmelia's blossoms grow upwards in a fountain-like shape topped by a rich floral crown. And as a bonus, it does not drop its flowers, and its leaves remain intensely green for an extended time.

"I am so excited about 'Charmelia' because it is seldom possible to bring a brand new flower to market," Sofia Herrera, managing director at Jardines de los Andes in Bogota, Colombia, told *The Produce News*. "Yes, people introduce new colors of existing flowers, but this is a totally new flower. It has great characteristics, textures, performance, and vase life. It's easy to tint and it is magical as it changes its looks and colors as it opens."

'Charmelia' flowers on day one. The deep rose colors will advance to an intense blush pink as the flowers open, enlarge and actually change over time.

First introduced to the U.S. floral industry at the 2014 International Floriculture Expo, 'Charmelia' has been gaining traction with designers and florists ever since. While lovely on its own, Charmelia is versatile and mixes well with other blooms in bouquets and arrangements. When it's combined with equally long-lasting flowers, a bouquet will remain attractive and fresh for weeks instead of days.

"I was so excited at the introduction of a new flower variety," J Schwanke, flower expert and chief executive officer at uBloom in Grand Rapids, MI, told The Produce News. "It was the same excitement I experienced when alstroemeria hit the market in the 70s. 'Charmelia' is a wonderful addition to our flower world; with its bright, vibrant foliage and two stages of blooming velocity, it is one of the few flowers that can dance the line between being a green, a filler, or a flower. And with its potential vase life of over 20 days, it's the poster child for value. Placing the flowers into a solution with Chrysal bulb food ensures quality advancement, because the high sugar content helps keep the colors bright and the greens green."

And Kevin Prill, portfolio lead floral director at Ahold USA in Carlisle, PA, told *The Produce News,* "Charmelia is a beautiful, delicate-looking flower that is long-lasting. It looks great in a mixed bouquet or just by itself in a vase."

Since hitting the market, 'Charmelia' has won the 2014 Dutch Flower Award, the 2015 FloraHolland Glazen Tulip Award, and the 2016 Keukenhof Novelty Award. The FloraHolland Glass Tulip is a prestigious award presented to the year's best market introduction in the ornamental cultivation sector. The winners are selected from hundreds of new cultivars and concepts introduced annually at auction.

" 'Charmelia' is bred exclusively by Royal Van Zanten and produced exclusively by the Jardines de Los Andes farm in Colombia for the U.S. and Americas market," Herrera said. "We have about 10 hectares in production now. The flowers are easy to tint for more color choices, and we will be introducing some new colors next year. One of the barriers to consumers wanting to buy flowers is that they don't think the flowers last long. Rather than their flowers lasting just a few days, here is an opportunity to buy flowers that will last weeks. It makes people feel good that they are getting their money's worth. In the U.S., Gardens America are the distributors for wholesalers, with World Class Flowers and Gems Group the sole distributors for the mass market, serving all supermarket chains across the country."

"Charmelia is a true performer with a wildflower look," Schwanke added. "I love the way it embraces the trend-forward blush colors and also performs. It builds confidence in cut flower purchase and use, and is another great way for us to encourage more people to enjoy more flowers more often."

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Will Marijuana Cultivation Affect the Floral Industry?

Editor's Note: This article has been reprinted with permission from the Society of American Florists, www.safnow.org.

Julie Martens Forney

It's the Gold Rush all over again in California, except this time the prize is cannabis. With the passage of Proposition 64, passed by the California state legislature in November 2016, speculators have invaded California at a speed similar to whiteflies on gerberas. Prop. 64 legalizes adult recreational use of marijuana and includes provisions for cultivation, provided local jurisdictions sign off. In passing the law, California joined the ranks of eight states and Washington, D.C. that have legalized recreational marijuana. In total, 29 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, and Guam have legalized medical marijuana.

In Colorado, Massachusetts, and Oregon, cannabis cultivation has fueled a real estate boom in dilapidated warehouses, unused factories, and abandoned self-storage operations, the kinds of properties that easily retrofit to growing facilities. Despite the multimillion dollar renovation price, cannabis growers like these spaces because they're private, easy to secure and adapt readily to climate control. But flower farmers know that energy costs quickly add up in enclosed production settings, and even with careful retrofits, the original structures weren't meant for high humidity, which can lead to expensive mold remediation.

That's where California comes in. Cannabis growers and their investors are eyeing the Golden State's agriculturally zoned land, including places such as the Salinas Valley.

In a land management effort aimed at breathing fresh life into abandoned flower farms while curtailing the number of new construction permits for cannabis operations, Monterey County passed an ordinance that cannabis cultivation can occur solely in existing greenhouses on existing farmland. Price per acre has doubled over the course of the last year, according to commercial broker Keller Williams Realty. In 2015, a 10-acre parcel with greenhouses listed for $2.5 million; in 2017, the same parcel lists at $5 million.

On the face of it, marijuana could take a bite out of flower production acreage. "Anyone with a structure like a greenhouse is in a good position to sell to a cannabis group," said Kasey Cronquist, PFCI, CEO of the California Cut Flower Commission. His group collects floral sales reports on a quarterly basis. So far, they haven't seen significant changes in the numbers.

"California farmers understand crop diversification," Cronquist said. "We have flower farmers who also raise other crops like hydroponic let-

tuce, cucumbers, and avocados. If the crop stops turning a profit, they'll get out. For many farmers, cannabis is simply another crop, but it happens to be more tantalizing to talk about than lettuce and tomatoes."

Over the last two decades, California flower farmers have diversified types of flowers they grow as rose and carnation production shifted to Colombia and Ecuador. Janet Louie, a second-generation owner at Green Valley Floral, is the only greenhouse cut flower grower left in the Salinas Valley.

"There's a lot of interest in growing marijuana in California, but our plan is to keep growing flowers as long as it is economically feasible," she said. "Growing flowers is much more than just a business to us, so we would like to see it continue for the foreseeable future."

Louie's philosophy is shared by many flower farmers. For others, the opportunity to sell land will prove too good to pass up. Other flower farmers consider growing marijuana a chance to keep their business alive to pass down to future generations. Cannabis brings in the cash that's needed to cover the expenses that make California flower growing an economic hurdle event. State rules that increased minimum wage and overtime rules have made profit margins that much thinner for flower farmers. Combine that with existing water restrictions, energy costs and pest issues, and it's easy to see why cash-generating cannabis carries some appeal. A conversion to marijuana can shift margins significantly.

"Marijuana brings a new alternative economic use for flower-growing land that's paying a premium," said Michael LoBue, CEO of the California Association of Flower Growers & Shippers (CalFlowers). "Some growers, especially those who don't have a succession plan, will take the windfall on their property. My opinion is that we'll see cut flowers and marijuana exist side by side."

As the sole traditional flower farmer remaining in Encinitas, Bob Echter of Dramm & Echter has witnessed what happens to flower farms when land values skyrocket. "That one factor makes it hard to transition a business to the next generation," he explained, due to the estate taxes in part, but mostly thanks to the easy promise of a purchase price that's flat-out tough to pass up. A second generation flower farmer himself, Echter is considering his own exit strategy as he watches his father's health decline. Echter's father started the business 45 years ago, when Encinitas was known for poinsettias and flowers. Echter's kids aren't interested in flower growing, but he's not ready to call it quits. "I'm passionate about farming," he said. "I'm invested in seeing agriculture remain in the area and want to do what I can to help ensure that happens." He's already sold one 10-acre parcel [for development], which has provided a little security to consider cannabis cultivation.

For the last 18 months, he's explored marijuana growing by tapping into the cannabis compliance industry, hiring consultants who help navigate regulations, security and laws. "What's required of cannabis producers is very different from growing flowers. For instance, there are many regulations related to handling the plant's waste products (stems, leaves)," he said. "It's a consumable product, so there are health issues you have to deal with. There's a lot more to it than growing a gerbera daisy."

Echter believes cannabis cultivation will impact the floral industry. His business has recently picked up a major account because another grower converted some of their property from flowers to cannabis. That's just one positive impact he sees from marijuana growing. "Margins are thin for everyone in this industry, and one key way to compete is by modernizing and mechanizing," he said. But doing so requires significant investment. "Rather than go up to my eyeballs in debt, I can convert part of my property to marijuana, get a higher margin and raise capital to put back into the business," he explained.

At this point Encinitas doesn't allow cultivation, but if—and when—it does, Echter will be ready. His goal is to grow both medical and adult use marijuana on 0.91 acres of his total 20 acres. "I'm not at all pessimistic about staying in the flower business, but I do think marijuana can be another viable part of our horticultural world," he said.

As far as challenges that may accompany the cannabis-flowers swap, Echter believes that finding reliable growers could become an issue. "Marijuana offers good money, and flower businesses may have trouble finding qualified growers," he said. If enough flower growers convert, he's also concerned that the freight lines will lower their level of service and geographical reach. "We need the volume of flowers to fill those trucks that head to Denver, Chicago and points east."

Martin Meskers, AAF, president of the Society of American Florists and owner of Oregon Flowers in Aurora, agrees. "We need flower growers. We don't want wholesalers and supermarkets to think there are no more flowers grown on the West Coast because we're all growing marijuana."

The other unspoken concern surrounding marijuana growing is the federal government. Presently, the bulk of the Drug Enforcement Agency's budget is directed toward the nation's opioid crisis. But Attorney General Jeff Sessions doesn't disguise his dislike for marijuana, and in May sent a letter to Congressional leaders asking permission to prosecute medical marijuana. At this point, most cannabis growers operate under a Manifest Destiny type of bravado, assuming that since the people have spoken in vote after vote, the feds will get on board. At the very least, it provides California Governor Jerry Brown something to fight with the Trump Administration about.

That discrepancy between federal and state law is perhaps the greatest

unknown in the realm of cannabis cultivation, but there's one thing everyone agrees on. If the DOJ decides to target marijuana, they'll look to make an example of California first—and "no one wants to be the unfortunate first grower who's arrested," admitted Echter.

"One thing I've learned during my 18 months of due diligence on cannabis production is that you have to be ready to shut down at a moment's notice," he said.

As the cannabis industry matures, many individuals fear the profits could evaporate overnight. That's tough to imagine in an industry that, in 2016, earned $4.7 billion for medical marijuana and $1.9 billion for recreational, according to New Frontier Data. As a whole, the cannabis industry is expected to exceed $24 billion by 2025. "We're seeing a lot of people jumping into marijuana now because the estimated wholesale value of a pound of pot is between $1,000 and $1,500," LoBue said. "What's the value of a pound of commercial cut flowers? $30 to $40 at the high end."

He contends that it will take "three to five years for the marijuana impact on the floral industry to sort out. There's an estimate that 85 percent of the pot grown in California today will remain illegal. Those growers have figured out how to work in that gray economy where everything is cash. Until the laws at the federal level are clear, it would cost them more to become legal. If 85 percent of the marijuana cultivation potential is accounted for, that leaves 15 percent that will compete with flower growers for land. So I don't think we'll see that much of an impact on flower growing."

Cannabis provides what seems to be an ideal option for local markets. While the federal ban remains, it can't be legally shipped across state lines. For flower growers weary from battling imports, marijuana could provide a chance to compete on a more level playing field, where labor and tax rates are the same across the board. For instance, all California cannabis producers will be required to pay a $15 minimum wage by 2023, while facing equitable tax and regulation requirements. The specter of low-paid labor, which allows a Colombian flower grower to produce flowers at a fraction of a California-grown bloom, will disappear with a cannabis crop that competes solely in a local market.

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But whether or not cannabis offers true protection from globalization remains to be seen. PharmaCielo, a Canadian company, is converting open air flower production ranges near Medellin, Colombia to medicinal cannabis. The head of PharmaCielo's Colombian subsidiary is a former chrysanthemum exporter. Their marijuana product will sell in Colombia and Canada.

Julie Martens Forney is a freelance writer with more than 25 years of experience writing about floriculture, both for consumers as well as the industry.

NORTHEAST

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont

Carolyn Snell
Carolyn Snell Designs
carolyn@snellfamilyfarm.com

Time to Make Some Hard Calls

As this season is winding down, we are looking ahead to changes we'd like to make for next year. I generally make rough qualitative notes all season, and keep checking in with myself about what we wish we had more of and what crops require too much from us, and aren't paying for the effort and space they need.

As I wrote earlier in the year, we had added back a few crops this year based on what I saw in New Zealand. We planted cosmos, annual centaurea, and *Scabiosa purpurea*, with a renewed hope that we could cut them at a more closed stage for a longer vase life. Scabiosa has been a success but we haven't been able to keep up with the daily maintenance on the others.

Sometimes it's difficult to look beyond our daily and weekly to-do lists to work on the big picture plans for the upcoming year, but I think it's necessary to hold onto as many details and feelings while they are fresh. Maybe it sounds negative, but for me it feels more liberating, kind of like donating away clothes that have been in my closet for years that I like but I never wear. Will I miss them when they are gone? Or will I feel energized by more space to focus on what we grow best and use the most?

I'm not suggesting that you all should stop growing these crops, but we found that in our repertoire, we just don't use or need them enough to bother growing them. It's tough, of course, because I really like many of these, but they just aren't paying.

Calendula: I used to grow it to bulk up our offerings on the early end, but we harvested fewer than 30 stems this year because we just didn't need it and the stage of harvest is rather specific to yield long lasting blooms. Also: sticky stems.

Carnation 'Black and White': This one is so beautiful and unusual, but the stems are too short for our regular bouquets and we weren't longing for more ingredients for our short bouquets during its season. We don't need it.

Centaurea: not high impact enough for the constant cutting required to stay ahead of spent blooms.

Cosmos: I love the floaty, airy blooms, but unless a designer needs it in bulk for an event, we really don't sell it in solid bunches, and they get lost in our mixed bouquets. I found myself composting these stems after bouquet making because they weren't being selected by our bunchers.

Chocolate cosmos: This is one of my all-time favorites, so I will probably keep growing it as a bedding plant but we just haven't gotten the balance right to yield marketable stems. Also, in not having them, we haven't really missed them.

Cynoglossum: too fussy for time of harvest and stage of harvest, and sometimes wilts at market. Shatters. Beautiful blue color that just wasn't needed during its season this year.

Dianthus 'Sweet Mix': We'll keep growing the white for June wedding work, but we fell behind on cutting the colorful ones, and didn't need them either.

Verbena bonariensis: I love this plant in the landscape and I had planned to pop in a tray or two, but we accidentally sold all the plants before I snagged mine, and I don't miss them in cutting or bouquet making. Purple also hasn't been as popular this year.

Cress 'Wrinkled Crinkled': I do like the color and texture of this greenery, but the harvest window of mature enough but not shedding seeds is rather short and the stems have an odd "Band-Aid-esque" odor. We are always/still on the hunt for interesting greens for all seasons, but we are taking a year or two off from this one. I reckon it has self-sowed quite a lot, anyway, so we'll have some for years to come regardless of our nurturing.

Glads are on notice. We had a thrips infestation and a complete crop failure and I don't even really miss them, it seems. I'll give them another chance next year, but maybe we just don't need them.

As we plan to make these changes for next year, we can either plant a few fewer rows to take care of, or we can try some new and unusual items to add to the mix. I can't wait to pore over the seed catalogs to make those decisions when things really start to quiet down.

Warm wishes of bountiful harvests to you from us here in Maine!

MID-ATLANTIC

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia

Lisa Ziegler
The Gardener's Workshop
lisa@shoptgw.com

It's been quiet in the Mid-Atlantic. I expect this is because we have all had our heads down doing our work. Farmers seeking help to overcome problems have asked for help on social media and it is a pleasure to see so many taking the time to step up and help. This is one of many advantages of being part of this village, helping one another.

It's a record-breaking time for the ASCFG; as I write we are on the brink of hitting 1300 members. The membership numbers continue to increase and the meeting attendance commonly sell out well before the event date: this is a sign of a healthy organization of hardworking folks in full swing.

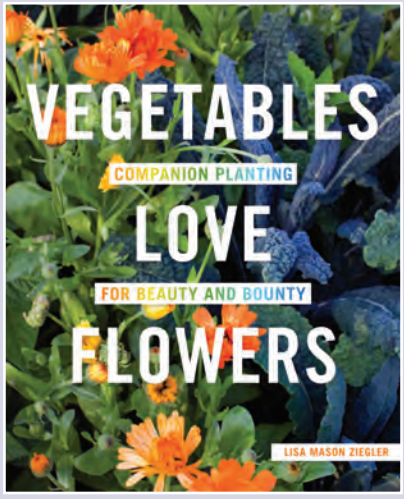
It seems as though our secret is out, that this "dream job" can actually provide a career, income, and opportunities. Sure, it's hard work, but isn't anything worth doing hard work? Having the ASCFG to round us up and bring us together to benefit from one another can be a part of each member's success when membership is embraced to its fullest. That this organization was started and sustained by forward-thinking members and leadership all those years ago is truly a gift. We are planning quite a celebration in September of 2018 because it will be the 30th year of ASCFG! Start planning your farm escape now!

I've had some great member visitors on my farm this summer; another benefit of membership. It doesn't always work out, but when a member asks to visit I do my best to make it happen. It never fails to benefit me as much as the visitor. Seeing is believing sometimes and asking a question can change everything and this goes both ways!

It started with Nan Matteson and Kathy Yearwood coming to redeem "a day on the farm" they purchased at the ASCFG Research Foundation Auction at the 2016 National Conference. These two put together quite a road trip visiting other member farms on their way from their home states of Ohio and Indiana to me in Virginia. They didn't even know each other until they met at the conference banquet table! During their visit, I left them alone with my sister Suzanne for a few moments. On my return, Kathy was practically in tears. Suzanne had showed her how we made speed bouquets for supermarkets. Kathy couldn't believe the simplicity. These are the moments that make this so worth the effort for all involved.

Kirsten and Nick Knecht found themselves nearby on a business trip for Nick's work. Kirsten reached out to me, and as it happens an afternoon visit worked out. Answering her questions and hearing what challenges she is faces was refreshing and insightful for me. Having grown up on an organic produce farm she was no stranger to the work and methods of selling, but sometimes it can be a struggle to find your own direction. Trying different business models that will fit your current lifestyle and be willing to change it as life's circumstances change can liberate and empower you to do the work you love.

I am so fortunate to be able live this #flowerfarminglife. Embrace it, share it, and live it. Don't get too caught up in the overwhelming chore list of growing flowers. Be as the rest of the world thinks we do every livelong day—stop and smell the sweet peas.



Pre-order your copy of Lisa Ziegler's new book at www.thegardenersworkshop.com

SOUTHEAST

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee

Val Schirmer
Three Toads Farm
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Forcing Glorious Blooms for Holiday Sales—Could This Be Right for You?

I'm surprised how many calls and emails I received from fellow flower farmers about forcing bulbs for holiday sales after mentioning it in one my recent Regional Reports. I have to admit, I love forcing bulbs, period. Thank goodness, forcing specialty bulbs—namely big, bold, beautiful amaryllis and paperwhites—for the holidays can really pay off. If you haven't tried it yet, or if you're thinking about doing it again, there's still time to give it a go this year!

When you think about how to sell bulbs, there's more than one way to do it. Here's what we've been doing for the last couple of years.

Amaryllis Forcing Kits

This all-in-one forcing kit is a great grab and go gift and one of our featured projects in our day-long Flower School that's all about bulb forcing. There's nothing extra to buy; everything is inside our hand-painted clay rose pot: a coffee filter covers the hole, there's totally dry ProMix (if it's the least bit damp, the bulb can start growing), the amaryllis bulb is pre-planted in the soil with the "neck" exposed, surrounded with Spanish moss, and our growing advice is folded on top. We include growing instructions inside the pot, cover the pot with a painted clay saucer, tie it all up with a satin bow, and add our variety-specific Three Toads Farm gift tag. We sell about 125 of these for $45 each.

Amaryllis or Paperwhites in Burlap Gift Bag

These U-LINE burlap bags are a simple, cost effective way to package ready-to-grow bulb gifts. We add a bit of the "straw" that comes in the bulb crates as cushioning and include growing instructions in the bag. This is either one 36+ cm amaryllis or 10 large paperwhites with our growing instructions, tied with a satin bow, and our variety-specific gift tag is attached. We sell these for $25 each.

Soon-to-Bloom Budded Amaryllis or Paperwhites

This has gotten to be a really big seller for us in the past two years. We start all the paperwhites in deep six-packs (just like we do for spring bulbs) because it's super easy to select bulbs that are all at the same stage, pluck then out of the six-pack, and pot them up in any kind or size of container. In the last two years we've also sold the paperwhites at the budded stage in their six-packs for $18 each during a two-day open house at a wonderful specialty store where we give several demos on how to "bring the outside in" by

using growing, natural ingredients in holiday decorating. Each year, we've sold every single six-pack we have at that price: it's that instant gratification and convenience that people crave. It takes 3-4 weeks (depending on variety) to get the paperwhites to this stage.

We offer a range of containers; each includes a satin bow and one of our Three Toads Farm gift tags:

- An 8" hand-painted clay pot of paperwhites, topped with Spanish moss, sells for $35.
- A 10" birch or concrete bowl of paperwhites, topped with either Spanish or reindeer moss sells for $75.
- A fabulous gold urn packed with paperwhites, topped with beautiful living clump moss sells for $165. While we don't sell many of these, it's a real showstopper that some folks just have to have in their home, or give as a special gift. We've found that if you include a few really high-end gifts, it makes the middle-range ones even more buyable.

For amaryllis, we start all the earlier-blooming bulbs in 4" or 6" green plastic pots. It can be tricky to get amaryllis to break dormancy, so we soak the base of the bulb in tepid water overnight to soften the roots and help the bulb wake up. Amaryllis need to be potted up with one-half to one-third of the bulb exposed. To sell amaryllis already growing (and it's always best if they are showing buds), it's very important to get the bulbs in a warm place, such as 70-80F, or even more. Putting them on a heat mat is perfect—honestly, you can't keep them too warm. Give them lots of light once they begin to sprout. As for pricing, our most popular item is three of the amaryllis bulbs in the 10" birch or concrete bowl, with either Spanish or reindeer moss, at $85. One thing to keep in mind is that the amaryllis that can be forced for the holidays are generally quite a bit less expensive than the larger Dutch varieties—more on that next.

Which Bulbs Perform the Best?

Since we've based our reputation on higher-end specialty flowers, I search far and wide for large bulbs, and the more unusual and unique—specialty!—amaryllis and paperwhites. As for where to get them, I recommend supporting the bulb suppliers who support us. Their livelihood depends on superior quality and they will get you the best bulbs, in the world.

For amaryllis, you can get bulbs that are faster to force in time for the holidays: the Israeli, Peruvian, and South African (Hadeco) amaryllis. I've used all of them with varying results over the years. The first time I tried any of these, it was the Hadecos. Since then I've used both the Israeli and Peruvians several times, and this year I've gone back to the Hadecos for 100 percent of my early-blooming order. We'll see how it works. The Hadecos are the largest bulbs, due to their long growing season, and the plants will rebloom more than the average, and have more flower stems—both key selling points for us.

There are also the Dutch amaryllis which are not harvested early enough to bloom reliably for the holiday, but still make GREAT gifts. We use Dutch amaryllis exclusively in our forcing kits because they are much more likely to remain dormant until the gift is given, the top taken off, the bulb watered, and then put in a warm place to start growing.

Let me say this: the size matters. The larger the bulb, the more stems and blooms you'll get. Of course, the larger the bulb, the more expensive it will be, but go for the largest size you can afford. It will definitely make a better display and you can charge more while using fewer bulbs.

For Dutch amaryllis, we've tried the jumbo sizes but we now use mostly 36+ cm bulbs. That can be too large for the forcing kits, so we also order 34-36 cm bulbs for those. The Israeli, Peruvian, and South African bulbs are all going to be smaller than the Dutch bulbs, because they're harvested earlier. I was really lucky this year to be able to get both 34-36 and 30-32 cm size Hadeco bulbs. Usually, the "Christmas flowering" amaryllis will be more around the 28-30 cm size or so.

For paperwhites, I'm an absolute sucker for 19+ cm bulbs because they throw off so many stems/flowers, and the larger bulbs are much more of a wow factor when people see them. But I couldn't get my favorite variety in that size bulb this year, so I had to settle for the next size down. Dang.

Our Favorite Varieties

Let's start with the paperwhites, because it's simpler. We don't sell 'Ziva'—by far the most commonly available paperwhite—because the strong fragrance is just too off-putting for too many of our customers. After trying out every variety I could get my hands on over the years, the one I've landed on is 'Nir', which has larger flowers, slightly shorter stems, and a softer fragrance. It can also be forced equally well in water or soil. That's just my personal favorite though; your customers may love 'Ziva' or the other less common varieties all have a softer fragrance, too.

As for amaryllis, we stay FAR away from the varieties commonly available during the holidays, especially the ones at big box or grocery stores. For our soon-to-bloom forced amaryllis, the majority of my order this year is a big double, almost triple bloomer called 'Alfresco,' followed by the candy-cane stripes of 'Razzle Dazzle.' Both should be perfect for our holiday sales.

Most customers who purchase our Dutch bulbs and forcing kits naturally lean to the whites, reds, and red/whites. However, in my demos and our workshop I like to bring up that while it's tempting to have these gorgeous traditional-colored blooms during the holidays, it's all the more special to give a vibrant-colored amaryllis that will bloom AFTER the holidays, during those dark dreary days of late winter. It's for that reason that our order of Dutch bulbs is pretty evenly split between double whites and reds, great big red/whites (such as 'Clown and 'Magical Touch'), and the varieties that bring so much cheer in February and March, including 'Gervase,' 'Terra Cotta Star,' and everything in the Nymph series, which are all simply and truly magical.

How to Sell Them

Specialty shops are a prime customer in our area and we've found there really isn't much competition beyond our local floral greenhouse, plus, there's plenty of business for us all to share. If a specialty shop is hosting an open house, offer to provide a demo. It's a great draw for them to include in their advertising and social media, and you'll sell more if you're there.

Put together a one-page description and call on the best local interior designers, architects, and landscape designers/architects. What you have to offer is the perfect over-the-top "thank you" for their best clients. It's fun and easy to deliver these bulb gardens in a warm car.

Finally, promoting your glorious holiday bulb gardens and gifts through your social media will send people knocking. After Thanksgiving, people go into overdrive.

Hope this has given a few ideas and inspiration! If you have any questions, don't hesitate to give me shout.

NORTH AND CENTRAL

Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming

Mimo Davis Duschack
Urban Buds City Grown Flowers
citygrownflowers@gmail.com

This is my final Regional Report as your North and Central Regional Director. It has been a fantastic three years and I thank you all for allowing me to serve this organization. I want to encourage each and every one of you to become active in our ASCFG family. And it truly is a family.

When I started growing in 1994 I never dreamed how dear my brothers and sisters in flower farming would become to me. They have become lifelong friends, and I am continually inspired by their hard work, ingenuity, and dedication. Everything I know and learned has come from other growers I met through the ASCFG. The flower farming world has changed a lot in these past decades. We see new and excited growers enter the fray. Welcome, I say! When I joined the ASCFG we were excited to have 50 people in a Growers' School; now we pack the room. There you can learn the ins and outs of farming, the reality beyond what the marketers of this lifestyle would have you believe it is. Really it is a lot of learning and hard work, artistic flow and organization, and having good financial sense.

Joining the ASCFG propels amateur growers into professional farming at least three years ahead of what one could accomplish independently. The knowledge gained not only leads us to bigger and better growing, but also teaches us how to run our businesses with integrity and respect. Every day as I look around my farm I see suggestions, given to me by other growers, which I have implemented. Our netting system came from Mike and Polly Hutchison of Robin Hollow Farm. Many of our perennials started as clumps dug from Wollam Gardens' fields. We have visited his farm on more than a few occasions, with him always saying "You've got to try this one, it's fabulous!" When we sow our poppies and dig our amazing ginger every fall, Betsy and Alex Hitt of Peregrine Farms come to mind. I remember one visit to their farm when Alex said "Do you want to see something cool?" as he forked out of the ground this massive pink ginger root. I can still smell the aroma that wafted around us and sold me on growing ginger. I credit Don Dramstad of Don's Dahlias for the amazing dahlias that our florist can't get enough of. There are many others who have contributed to our success, but none of that would have happened if I was not active in the organization.

I not only attend the meetings and conferences but use them as networking opportunities, setting up farm visits for the upcoming season. I get off my farm and visit other farms as often as I can. I know there are some of you who have joined the ASCFG and believe that you don't have to go to the meetings because they are videotaped, and you can save money and just watch them from the comfort of your home. I'm here to tell you what a grave disservice that kind of thinking is for you and your business! GET OUT! And go see some of the amazing farms and farmers that make up the ASCFG. I promise it will be money well spent!

Joining the ASCFG propels amateur growers into professional farming at least three years ahead of what one could accomplish independently.

Thanks for letting me have the best gig on the planet! As I leave my post I look forward to the ways in which this organization, this family—our family—will grow and develop.

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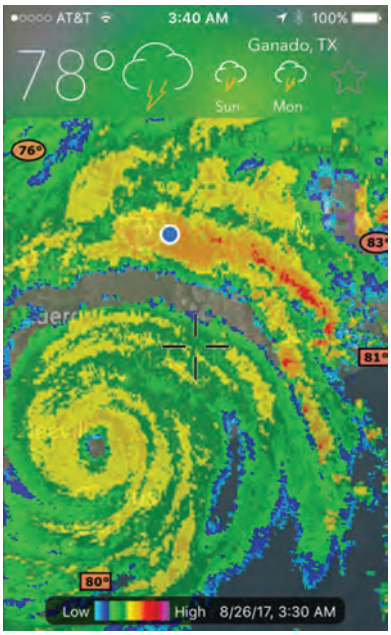
SOUTH AND CENTRAL

Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana,New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah

Rita Anders
Cuts of Color
ritajanders@cvctx.com

The summer of 2017 was going awesome until…Harvey. I usually have my head spinning with information about flowers to share, but as I write this in early September my head is waterlogged. We were having record sales of bouquets and straight bunch material at the large store that carries our product. We had even picked up a couple of wholesale warehouses and we were just moving right along.

On Tuesday, August 29 I made my regular delivery into Houston to Central Market, Mayesh, and a floral designer, By the time I got home I found out there was a tropical depression out in the Gulf. So we made bouquets on Thursday for Friday, and made our trip again, but this time we pretty much picked anything we could, making a large number of bouquets like we always do. I didn't sleep much that night as we kept watching the radar and wondering how bad this was going to be. Since I couldn't sleep I thought I would get up at three and head into Houston to drop my load off, and be back home early to beat the bad weather. Houston is an hour away: many times we have tons of rain and they get nothing, or vice versa. After some conversation with my husband I decided to not leave until 6:00 a.m. because there was some heavy rains on the radar and I didn't want to drive in the dark. I also needed him to stay here and start prepping for the storm.



I had about 1000 new dahlias in 4" pots out in the seedling house, plus 200 trays of zinnia, celosia, cosmos, gomphrena, marigolds, and grasses ready to go out. The storm was tracking to come right over us, or really close, and I needed all those plants tucked away in our flower shed in case the greenhouses would be torn up and damage my seedlings.

By the time I got back home, it had started raining lightly, and by evening it had turned into torrential downpours, and got windier and windier. On Friday night the storm came ashore, just south of us. It moved ever so slowly and rained and rained and rained. We think we got between 25 and 30 inches of rain. Houston got twice that in some areas. The wind was very gusty and around 50 mph. We have a house at the coast where the storm was projected to come ashore. My heart and body were just worried sick that we were going to lose the place we loved so much. The storm came in over about 40 miles from it, sparing both it and the little town in which it's located. Now, looking back how many lost their only house they have, I feel selfish for worrying about our family's vacation home.

For three days we sat in the house and just knew that when we would be able to check everything it wasn't going to be good. On Tuesday morning I got out and checked the gardens and was like wow we might be okay but during the day the sun began to shine and it got into the 90's. All my sunflowers that were taller than a foot fell over, and I guess the roots just drowned, and with the heat the plants couldn't transpire, and they cooked. Zinnias blew over but then just also turned brown and died. I broke the stems and they are brown inside.

The dreaded-to-pick gomphrena devil plant lived through it all. Marigolds and amaranth made it as well but were lying on the ground. Surprisingly, the celosia also pulled through. It's amazing how strong and resilient the plants are for the most part.

Most of the greenhouses were okay, though we lost the covering on one greenhouse; we were in the northeast quadrant of the storm which packs the worst part winds. We also monitored the greenhouse roofs. I had to punch a couple of holes in one of them because it was holding a large amount of water and I was worried it would crash the roof in. Poly patch tape and we will get those fixed.

We will bounce back and be fine. We will miss 4-8 weeks of sales but I still consider ourselves very blessed. Two towns near us located on the Colorado River also flooded and were declared disasters. Our farm is located on the high side of the river so will never flood.

There are several growers near me and unfortunately we are all in the same boat. Bad thing is we are in the time of year when if we plant now they may not even make it before frost or if they do flower, it's going to be a lot of work for not much blooming time. I lamented on what I should do and luckily I had a good supply of seedlings growing already and I will get those out into the gardens as soon as ground is workable. I could plant these seedlings in my greenhouses where I can run the production into late November but at the same time I have to keep in mind that I have all my plug

orders for crops such as snapdragons, dianthus, delphinium, poppies, and campanula coming in October first, as well as all my anemones and ranunculus. Knowing this I will plant what I can in greenhouses so it won't frost while leaving plenty room in all my beds for plants that are coming.

Farming is always a gamble and you just have to roll with the punches. I've been totally stressed throughout this whole ordeal and I've had to put my mind on other things or its just gets overwhelming. We need to do some greenhouse maintenance and we wanted to take a few days off for a vacation since we were too busy all summer. Now we have time to do this.

I look back at all the plant material lost and wonder was there anything I could have done to protect my plants and now seeing how bad the storm was, I know that I couldn't have done anything else. I know many of you have watched the devastation that the coast of Texas experienced and trust me the pictures can't even do it justice. I could share hundreds of stories of the storm but you just can't fathom it until you have been through something like this.

There are so many heroes that came together and saved each other and just would bring you to tears. I've shed many myself as the days unfolded as I saw all the generosity pour out from the communities around me as so many needed help. Our son was one of those Texans and their boats that went into Houston to pluck people out of their homes. A CNN reporter and his camera man jumped in the four boats that were in my son's group and filmed them as they were guided through the flooded streets of Houston. That night we were seeing Brian on the national news. While he was in Houston I went to the shelter and helped there as I knew I would just go nuts worrying about him and I was sick of all the TV coverage and I needed to get out and everything on the farm was just too wet and couldn't do anything constructive.

My sister works in the ER and she handled so many cases of patients affected by the storm. So many were stress-related issues and digestive issues related to not eating the right foods during the worst of the experience.

We will work hard to get our lives back to normal but it will be awhile as we have so many around us that have to rebuild. I want to thank all of you who reached out with phone calls, texts, and emails to check on us and did so repeatedly. Compared to others we are blessed but at the same time we have experienced a catastrophic storm that we will never forget. I'm sharing our story in hopes that if this happens to you, that you will stay positive and look into the situation and see the miracle that comes from experiences like this. It may not be a hurricane but something else equally devastating but stay positive; there is always something good that comes out of something bad. You just have to open your eyes and heart.

WEST AND NORTHWEST

Alaska, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington

Lennie Larkin
B-Side Farm
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The First Annual Slow Flowers Summit

After just seven seasons of farming, I managed to take a real vacation in the heat of the summer. I of course spent it not by "getting away from it all" and leaving the flower and farming world behind, but visiting farms and attending the fabulous Slow Flowers Summer in Seattle. I'd love to share with you guys some highlights from the two sessions that really inspired me to make the trip.

Amy Stewart's *Flower Confidential* Turns Ten

The first was a keynote from Amy Stewart, author of the great book about the international flower trade, *Flower Confidential*. It's been ten years since she published the book and I was so curious to hear her recent reflections. Although she reiterated that she was merely a visitor to our world of flowers rather than a true expert, it's hard to deny that she immersed herself deep into the industry and shed some much-needed light on it. One thing she really wanted to impress upon us during her talk was that her takeaways on the international flower industry are actually more nuanced than they may seem at first glance. Namely, as we navigate the ins and outs of the domestic vs. imported flower industries, it can be easy to forget the jobs and

the people behind all this commerce and the dialogue around it. Things become a lot less black and white and yes, more nuanced, when we're able to remember this.

Interestingly, I also really zeroed in on some musings from Amy on the art of storytelling, as well as some really astute business tips. Here are a few of them:

- In reaching out to your customers or potential customers, think about the fact that people will remember a story, not facts. Think about people wine tasting and gushing to you about their experience. It's never "They produce x amount of wine each year on x number of acres." but "...and the winemaker's son couldn't pronounce 'grape' when he was little so we now all refer to them as 'apes.'" (my made-up example). Think about colorful ways to tell your story!

- Along with stories, people are after experiences. Show them what it's like to be a flower farmer or a florist for a day.

- What do customers keep asking you for? Respond to actual customer demand rather than what you think people will want. If you sell $20 bouquets but keep getting asked for $4 poseys, it's time to consider the $4 posey!

Panel Discussion with Chantal Aida Gordon, Leslie Bennett, Riz Reyes, and Nicole Wahlquist—Where's the Diversity in Floral Design and Horticulture?

This panel was the first thing that jumped out to me about the Slow Flowers Summit, and felt like a discussion that was long time coming for our industry. Chantal did a great job moderating the panel and trying to tackle some big issues in a short time frame.

With so many talking points to get to, the panel began with questioning the very premise of the theme. They started with the word "diversity" and whether it's even the word we're looking for. The consensus was sort of that no, it's a word that's a bit over-appropriated and is, as Leslie put it, "too tame a goal". The meat of what we're looking for is equal representation, a redistribution of power in who has a seat at the table in our industries, along with who sets the trends and takes up visible space. Paraphrasing one panelist: gardening belongs to everyone, so why does it look like it's something for only white people (in the media, Instagram, etc.)? This really hit home for me as I thought about, on a basic level, the people I follow and am aware of in the flower world. They're just overwhelmingly white.

On that note, I got good tips on some legends to get to know. The panelist went around and each shared a hero, their "horticultural icons".

- Alice Walker: check out *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*

- Maurice Harris: Bloom & Plume

- Pearl Fryar: watch the movie "A Man Named Pearl"

- Jamaica Kinkaid: read *My Garden (Book)*

This lack of representation in our leadership is just the surface of some complex and deep-rooted issues in the representation in our field. I'll move on to a few action items suggested by the panelists, all aiming at the goal of broadening our industry, in terms of representation in the media, in our base customers and potential customers, and in our leadership.

- *Pro bono* work can be really valuable! If you have priced your products or services out of certain markets that you want to serve, devote some time and resources each season to *pro bono* projects.

- "Identify the issue, face it, and start talking about it". I love this advice. As a white person in a predominantly white field, I sometimes feel at a loss for how to put words to and then work to rectify some of these shortcomings. I'm also aware that people are scared to try to talk about these problems, but how can we improve if we don't first

talk about what's going on? Leslie pointed out a concrete example, by praising Lisa Waud for featuring many people of color in her images. Whether or not this was the distinct intention, you can imagine that Lisa noticed a lack of images of people of color out in the flower-land-insta-sphere, and decided to do something about it.

- Find ways to create opportunities in the field for people of color, urban, and underserved communities. Start a class or an after-school program with flowers. Offer one scholarship per class you teach for someone who wouldn't otherwise know about your class.

I found these examples to be helpful not only for being tangible and easy to do, but because they encourage us to think and talk about our community and how we can meaningfully expand it. Personally, I've been increasingly shocked and a bit horrified to look around at the business I've created, one that serves primarily rich white people. I think it's important for us to take a look at ourselves and remember that we're not just passive actors out in the world, that we in all in fact play huge roles in setting industry norms and standards. Who else can we get to that table?

Thanks so much to Debra for putting on this fabulous conference. I'll post a more complete write-up of the experience on my blog, along with notes from Teresa Sabankaya, Emily Ellen Anderson, and Lisa Waud. I'll also share field notes from visiting fantastic farmers at Raindrop Farm, August Farm, Jello Mold Farm, and Everyday Flowers. Thank you all for having me to your gorgeous farms and for making me feel at home in the PNW. The rest of you across the country are cool too, but I've got to say I really do love our region's farmers.

Photos by Hannah Brenlan and Luke Holtgeerts

CANADA

Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan

Janis Harris
Harris Flower Farm
janisandmarkharris@hotmail.com

Plan an ASCFG meeting for smack dab in the middle of a busy growing season? Sure! The Canadians can handle it! I was so proud of everyone who was part of the event. The overall response from the participants was overwhelmingly positive.

On August 7 and 8, around 100 people came to the Niagara region of Ontario to see what was growing there, and learn from some great growers and flower people. I was amazed that over half of the attendees were first-time attendees. There were people from all over Canada, the USA, and from the UK! It was definitely proof that an event in Canada was overdue.

We started the morning at Green Park Nurseries. Karl Vahrmeyer, Jr., his brother Mike, and eldest son Karson were the tour guides. We walked the vast acreage on the home farm. The rolling hills were covered with all types of willows and rows of lilacs, and the hydrangea planting looked like a cloud that I would like to lie on. Karl talked about varieties, pruning, and growing techniques of each woody plant. We then went to Karl Sr.'s property to see the rosehip, forsythia, and dogwood production. There were a few drones flying around which were able to catch some pretty amazing views of these spectacular farms.

Karl Vahrmeyer and son lead the tour at Green Park Nurseries.

Luckily we were inside for the afternoon sessions because the rain started. We learned from Kees Van Schaik about ranunculus and anemone production. Kees is a wealth of flower knowledge. He started growing flowers in Holland and then moved to Canada. He is still in the greenhouse industry but now sells supplies you need in a commercial greenhouse.

Bill DeReus wowed the crowd with his knowledge of peonies. He has been growing flowers since he was a young boy and says he has tried every flower from ageratum to zinnia. His farm now focuses on peony production and he typically sells over 100,000 stems each spring. Peonies are a hot topic right now and he gave some great information to a very interested audience.

Sarah Nixon talked about her unique business model. She very meticulously searches urban yards in Toronto she turns into her growing plots. She talked about how she goes about deciding on a location, what her contract looks like, and what she does with the flowers she grows. I think we can all learn about planning and location selection from Sarah. Even if we have acres it is important to plant the right things in the right spot.

After a very informative day the attendees set off in groups and toured the area. I packed my van full of people followed by a few more cars and we headed out for Niagara Falls. I had one American in my van who said she had been to the American side of The Falls before but never seen them from the Canadian side. After we made our first drive past she said "Okay, your side is much better!"

Tuesday morning started off at Wendalane Farm. Jen, Bob, and the kids were very excited to have us and worked very hard to get ready for 100 people in their beautiful century barn hay loft. Jen is so knowledgeable about her flowers. She says she is just getting the business to serious business stage but she knows her stuff. She has been growing for quite a number of years. She has raised her children while growing flowers. I think Jen and Bob are excited that their oldest son will have his driver's license soon, and are thinking of the possibilities. Throughout the walking tour I heard comments about how happy the attendees were that we were touring a farm that was like theirs—a size they could relate to and see themselves doing. Jen and Bob presented together about their farmers' market selling model. It was great to see that each of them had their parts, but together they were a great team. They created a mock market stand display and showed how they are able to pack a lot of flowers into their vehicles for transport to the market. I have been going to our farmers' market for about 9 years and I still learned tips from them.

Jennifer Feddema and Bob Gerryts, Wendalane Farms

Group at LaPrimavera Farms

The morning moved along to Melanie Harrington's presentation about social media success. Melanie let the secret out that she is a total introvert. The idea of presenting to 100 people totally terrified her. But she made a commitment to herself to do things that will help her grow. She was a natural presenter. She talked about how to get the most engagement and tips on how to gain more followers. Her stunning pictures and amazing eye for colour makes her profile shine. In her presentation she showed profile examples of other well-followed flower people. I think we all gained at least some bit of information that was useful in trying to navigate the new norm of our social media driven lives. Think about it: as much as we want to go against the internet overtaking, our society is run by it. I met many of my close "flower farmer friends" for the first time at this event even though I feel like I already knew them.

During the lunch break attendees travelled to Dundas to see La Primavera Farms. We were welcomed to the beautifully restored barn loft of Juan (Dad) and Joanne (Daughter) Feddes. The view from the back balcony was breathtaking. Jessica Dreyer started the afternoon with her presentation about being an event florist. She uses both local and imported flowers for her thriving wedding florist business. She talked about how to strengthen farmer/florist relationships, what she would be looking for as a florist and how she goes about doing a wedding from consult to install. It is great for farmers to know about the other side of flowers.

Carole Charbonneau came all the way from northern Ontario (Sudbury) to talk to the group about her brick and mortar flower shop. She added a hoophouse in her back yard in the past few years and uses flowers she grows along with other flowers in her designs. I asked the attendees to bring flowers for the demo portion of the event. There were so many! Bailey Hale even brought some of his amazing sweet peas across the border! What a treat! Carole did a fabulous design with 'Café au Lait' dahlia, white cosmos, thornless blackberry foliage, and so many other amazing flowers. I was her 'go-fer' and it was so fun helping her with her flower selection.

Natasa Kajganic came to speak to the attendees about the Toronto Flower Market. It is a unique sales model that happens once a month in Toronto—a whole market filled with nothing but flowers. It was great to hear how the concept had grown from a vacation in Europe to a real thing with growing attention in Toronto. Even if you weren't from the Toronto area it was a great story of "If you build it they will come."!

After the presentations there was time for self-guided tours of La Primavera and William Dam Seeds (around the corner). There was lots of socializing, good food, and good fun over dinner.

I think back on the event and am so proud of the group I had working with me. Our team was so eager and focused on making this a great event for everyone that attended. As I was

Carole Charbonneau design demonstration

introducing some of the speakers I had to control my emotions because I was so proud of them, and I realized while standing up in front of the crowd that the people I was introducing were "MY People, MY Friends". They are people that I know I can count on for encouragement and knowledge. We are always learning from each other. I'm so glad that so many people will learn and benefit from some great people. So watch the videos!

I was glad to hear that attendees made the side trips to the Ontario Flower Growers Auction and other farms along their driving route. I was happy to welcome and show some great flower farmer friends my farm. It is cool to experience a friend's farm in real life. Social media post are more relatable because you were there. So I encourage you to get out and take the road trips. I have been lucky enough to fit some road trips in this summer to see other farms and I am going to make a point to see more farms. I can convince my kids that flower farm holidays are a good idea for a few more years, until Disney wins out.

Group at Niagara Falls

Meet the ASCFG's Newest Members

Mark Allen, Smithers-Oasis/Floralife, Walterboro, SC
Cynthia Alvarez, Montrose, CO
Jen Badding, Sweet Soil Farm, Washington, MO
Renee Bailey, The Flower and the Leaf, Ancram, NY
Michelle Barnes, Onancock, VA
Christine Barnett, Longmont, CO
Terri Barr, Summerlark Farms, Claremore, OK
Katie May Beiler, Katie May's Crafts, Gordonville, PA
Amie and Molly Bengtson, BackCountry Blooms, Lumby, BC
Ben Bergmann, NCSU, Raleigh, NC
Julie Blair, Boonsboro, MD
Kristen Brower, Daisy May's Farm, Oxville, PA
Kelly Brown, Blue Heron Farms, Watsonville, CA
Sarah Brudecki, Knoxville, TN
Cheryl Burton, Old Stonehouse Farm, Random Lake, WI
Jessica Chase, Sierra Flower Farm, Gardnerville, NV
Amber Lea Conroy, Villanova, PA
Vicki Cooper, Twin Creek Flowers, Hahira, GA
Dawn Cosgrove, Climax, SK
Nathaniel and Patricia Craley, Fields of Flowers, Purcellville, VA
Linda D'Arco, Little Farmhouse Flowers, Jay, NY
Clarence Denton, Clearwater, KS
Jenifer Domenico, Oxford, OH
Diane Einsiedler, Shekomeko Farms, Pine Plains, NY
John Farrell, Nashville, TN
Samantha Farrell, Roots to Blooms, La Plata, MD
Elise Freda, The Crooked Barn Flower Farm, Kingston, MA
Stacy Garringer, Over Yonder Flower Farm, Farmland, IN
Russell Goeken, Urban Poppy, Savannah, GA
Michelle Gorham, San Antonio, TX
Abby Guy, Pure Bird Blooms, Tiverton, ON
Jennifer Hahn, Lenape Flower Farm, West Chester, PA
Lori Hammond-Colwell, Bursting Blooms Farm, Candor, NY
Deborah Hanley, East Northport, NY
Dolores Harnish, Posey & Patches, Willow Street, PA
Candice Hart, Bloomington, IL
Suzette Hatfield, Oklahoma City, OK
Jamie Hengartner, Rylea Bloom, Toronto, ON
Julie Hickey, Clearwater Farms, Keswick, ON
Esther Hill, Summertime Peonies, North Pole, AK
Kimberly Hoffman, Kimberly's Flower Farm, New Freedom, PA
Laci Holbrook, Twin Bridges, MT
Sarah and Jeremy Holmes, Ol' Glory Heritage Farm, Alden, MI
Nick and Kimi Hopkins, Kena Farms, Stonewall, TX
Megan Huang, Dublin Flower Farm, Plain City, OH
Nathan Jahnke, Cary, NC
Cristian and Cynthia Janz, Bloom Flower Farm, Abbotsford, BC
Heather Jones, Flora Jones, Lansdale, PA
Helen Julig, Awesome Blossom Cut Flower Farm, Sheguianda, ON
Jared Keigher, Onarga, IL
Marcus King, Triple Tree Flowers, Gap, PA
Jessica Kleinsasser, Sioux Falls, SD
Ellen Krzemien, The Flower Stand, Springville, NY
Clara Lamb, Greenstone Fields, Frederick, MD
Rachel Lane, C.A.S.F.S., Santa Cruz, CA
Ann Langley, Loganville, GA
Katie Lantz, Myerstown, PA
Carmen Laumbach, Vintage Petals, Wainwright, AB
Lindley Gaston and Lee Adler, Browns and Hounds Farm, Pineland, SC
Stephanie Leftwich, Henrico, VA
Jenna Livingston, Flourish Blooms, Orton, ON
Barb Loar, Sensible Goat Farms, Westerville, OH
Natalie Lumpkin-Brown, Elgin, TX
Michael Lupacchino, Jr., Lansdale, PA
Marybeth Lybrand, Visalia, CA
Evangeline Mahler, Mahler Ridge Farm, Eltopia, WA
Sarah-Eva Marchese, Mott & Spry, Inc., St. Charles, IL
Page McGavisk, Reisterstown, MD
Jordan McGuire, Alma, GA
Jennifer Meachum, Hartford, MI
Nikki Meyer, Sweet Soil Farm, Washington, MO
Amy Miller, Sensible Goat Farms, Columbus, OH
Katie Miller, Atglen, PA
Amanda Montgomery, Hummingbird Gardens, Richmond, VA
Andrea Morris, Up with the Sunflowers, West Lafayette, IN
Rebecca and Thomas Norton, The Sunny Farm, Mashpee, MA
Diana Orford, Maidens, VA
Elizabeth Patterson, Blue Dot Farm, Nicasio, CA
Maureen Petrovich, Cornerstone Farm, Apex, NC
Brie Quinn, Hudson, NY
Beth Romero, Beach Park, IL
Julie Ross, Agape Fields, Nicholasville, KY
Erika Rumbley, The New Garden Society, Roslindale, MA
Candy Scheiderer, Scheiderer Farms, Marysville, OH
Gaylene Seibold, Patchwork Flower Farm, Springfield, MO
Claudia Seixas, Sweet Greens Farm, Scottsville, VA
Krista Lee Sherkey, Doylestown, PA
Ann Stratton, Norwalk, CT
Amber Swidersky, Melancthon, ON
Chris Sykes, Tampa, FL
Julie Thames, Fayetteville, GA
Donia Varnon, Spearman, TX
Ryan Vytlacil, Richmond, VA
Megan Wakefield, Greenstone Fields, Sterling, VA
Bonnie Warndahl, Winnowburrow Farm, Colfax, WI
Kate Watters, Agave Maria Botanicals, Flagstaff, AZ
Priscilla Wentworth, Anchored Roots Farm, Hollywood, MD
Sarah Wexler-Mann, Sweet 16 Farm, Houston, MN
Andrea Willey, Poolesville, MD
Adrienne Williams, Atlanta, GA
Lynn and Tim Windmeyer, Homeplace Fields, St. Joseph, MO
Grant Winkelmann, Texas Specialty Cut Flowers, Wimberley, TX
Stella Wong, New York, NY
Kelly Wood, Grace Gardens, Birmingham, AL
Patterson Yazzie, Plum Nelly - A Flower Farm, Coushatta, LA
Blake Young, Young's Greenhouse and Flower Shop, Ft. Wayne, IN
Donna Yowell, MS Urban Forest Council, Madison, MS

New Faces on the ASCFG Board of Directors

These fine folks have been chosen to represent you on the ASCFG Board of Directors, and help lead the organization through even more productive and successful years.

North and Central Regional Director
Jamie Rohda
Harvest Home
Waverly, Nebraska

South and Central Regional Director
Shanti Rade
Whipstone Farm
Flagstaff, Arizona

Mentor Program Begins Its Second Cycle

Earlier this year, the ASCFG received nearly 100 Mentee applications. It was difficult for the committee to narrow down the many excellent applications to just five matches, and the widely varied geography of both Mentor and Mentee applicants played a large role in the selection process. Making matches in the same areas was not easy, but these five Mentor-Mentee pairings were selected. They'll work together in 2018 and 2019.

Mentee
Katie Aurand, Back Mountain Farm, Milroy, Pennsylvania
Mentor
Dave Delbo, Dave's Flowers, Catawissa, Pennsylvania

Mentee
Jillian Mickens, Open Door Farm, Cedar Grove, North Carolina
Mentor
Susan Wright, Shady Grove Gardens & Nursery, Vilas, North Carolina

Mentee
Stacey Shank, Locust Creek Flower Farm, Pana, Illinois
Mentor
Kent Miles, Illinois Willows, Seymour, Illinois

Mentee
Jessica Weatherford, Scenic Blooms,Oswego, Kansas
Mentor
Ethan Jones, Wild Goose Gardens, Osceola, Missouri

Mentee
Jessie Witscher, Understory Farm, Sudbury, Vermont
Mentor
Chas Gill, Kennebec Flower Farm, Bowdoinham, Maine

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ASCFG Seasoned Growers' Meeting

March 11-13, 2018 Chateau LeMoyne

Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers

The ASCFG presents a meeting designed specifically for cut flower growers well established in their careers; those considering expansion or retirement, farm transition, and long-term planning. This intensive two-day event is limited to 50 attendees; registration will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis.

Moderated by Lynn Byczynski, founding publisher of *Growing for Market*, author of *The Flower Farmer*

Sunday, March 11

6:00 – 8:00 p.m. Icebreaker reception with bouquet bar
Grab a cocktail and then grab your clippers! Join us in the courtyard for a relaxed evening of conversation around the bar…the Bouquet Bar, that is! Buckets of locally-grown blooms and a selection of vases will be available during this cocktail reception for you to create an arrangement for your room. Enjoy flowers just for the fun of it! And while you play with the local fare, take time to chat with fellow attendees and start building the supportive community that will make the next two days unforgettable.

Monday, March 12

8:00 a.m. Coffee and beignets

8:30 a.m. Succession, Retirement, and Estate Planning I—Elements of Succession and Estate Planning, Poppy Davis
This first session will introduce the common models for passing a land-based business through a succession and estate plan. We will introduce the important tools of estate planning, and discuss ways assets are wholly or partially transferred during life or upon death, or over time. The second half of the session will focus on the legal and accounting structures used to keep the land or facility where you operate as legally and financial distinct from the business itself, and the business structures and legal agreements used to transfer a business.

10:00 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. Deep Sustainability, Mark Cain
You need to make money, but money alone is not life-sustaining. Hear how a farmer who has been running a successful farm enterprise for over 30 years incorporates important factors like physical and mental health, quality of life, and personal values into his farm business, while also ensuring that it stays financially viable. This popular presenter will cover this less talked about, but equally important, aspect of farming.

11:30 a.m. Study Hall Session One
Each attendee will receive electronic files to create her or his own Action Book. Over three study hall sessions you can work in small groups or on your own to translate speakers' sessions into action items for yourself. Poppy Davis will be circulating through the session and available to answer questions.

12:00 – 1:30 p.m. Lunch included

1:30 p.m. Demystifying Grant Writing, Mimo and Miranda Davis-Duschack
Growers looking to expand production, experiment with new processes, and add new systems to their farm often shy away from the sometimes-daunting prospect of finding, applying for, and implementing agricultural grants. Two flower growers have successfully obtained USDA funding for projects on their Midwestern urban farm, and will break down the process for you.

3:00 p.m. Transitioning to the Next Generation, Alex Hitt
Farm transition is a popular subject in the farm community as many farmers are getting older (average age is 59) and are trying to figure out what they are going to do with their businesses, properties, and themselves as they get even older. Hear the personal story of how after 35 years, Alex and Betsy of Peregrine Farm are transitioning their farm business to a non-family member while phasing into retirement.

4:30 a.m. Study Hall Session Two
During this time you can use the Action Book to start to describe your current land-based business, and the key people in your life who will be part of your succession or estate plan.

6:00 – 8:00 p.m. Happy Hour
Relax in the hotel courtyard with a drink, and let your brain rest for a while, before heading out to explore New Orleans with your colleagues.

Tuesday, March 13

8:00 a.m. Coffee and beignets

8:30 a.m. Training the Next Generation, Mark Cain
The apprenticeship model of live-in, on-farm training is as old as the hills, and can regularly infuse a farm with fresh youthful energy. But there are important distinctions between training young people who live and work on the farm, and having more skilled hourly farm workers who come and go. Do you have the temperament, patience, facilities, and kind of operation where apprenticeship arrangements can work? In this session, we'll explore the basics of acquiring interns, daily work organization, social aspects, housing, pay, meals, as well as important pitfalls to avoid.

10:30 a.m. Succession, Retirement and Estate Planning II—Matching Your Tools to Your Purpose, Poppy Davis
The second session will discuss processes for matching your goals for the people and assets in your life with the tools used to transfer assets, and the various roles people assume either to take over business management or to administer your affairs if you are incapacitated or deceased. We will discuss family meetings, the roles of accountants and attorneys, the use of trusts, powers of attorney, and buy-sell agreements and how to think about the difference between fair and equal in estate planning.

12:00 – 1:30 p.m. Lunch included

1:30 p.m. Study Hall Session Three
In this final study hall session you will match estate planning tools with the assets and people you identified in earlier sessions and there will be time for additional questions, small group discussion, and synthesis.

3:00 p.m. Break

3:30 p.m. Hive Mind: Dealing with Market Saturation and Competition
Join this Q and A group session as attendees share strategies and solutions needed to succeed and survive when faced with competition from start-ups, eroding market share, or other obstacles that can impact your bottom line.

4:30 p.m. Conclusion *Turn the page to read about the presenters.*

Chateau Le Moyne

Call for reservations by February 24: 1-800-747-3279
Rate: $159
Refer to Group Code: AGU
Group Name: Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers
Group Rate Applicable: March 11-16, 2018

The Presenters

Lynn Byczynski founded *Growing for Market,* a national periodical for market farmers, in 1992 and operated it for 25 years until she sold the business in 2016. Throughout that time, she and her husband, Dan Nagengast, ran a small organic vegetable and flower farm near Lawrence, Kansas, and sold through a cooperative CSA, at farmers' markets, to chefs, florists, and natural food stores. Her farming experiences provided constant fodder for her writing career, which included her books *The Flower Farmer* and *Market Farming Success*, both still in print. She recently assumed the role of head honcho at Seeds from Italy, a garden seed import business she and Dan bought in 2011 and are planning to pass on soon to their two adult children, Will and Laurel. It's a difficult job that requires her to grow Italian vegetables in her home garden, go to Italy every other year, and dine at Italian restaurants. Once she has transferred her business knowledge to the next generation, she plans to retire back into her true calling of writing about horticulture and the people who are passionate about it.

Mark Cain, co-owner of Dripping Springs Farm in Huntsville, Arkansas, came to organic market gardening through his interest in all things biological, with a degree in biology from the University of Illinois and subsequent study in organic horticulture at the Farm and Garden Project of the University of California Santa Cruz in 1978. Mark is an active member of the Fayetteville Farmers Market Board of Directors, and often an invited speaker at local and regional sustainable agriculture conferences.

Mimo and Miranda Davis-Duschack carved a one-acre urban flower farm into the middle of a St. Louis neighborhood. Now in its sixth year, their intensive, almost year-round operation produces more than 85 kinds of cut flowers, sold at farmers' markets, direct to florists, and for weddings and events. They have also been awarded several grants totaling $52,800 that have helped have helped them expand their business dramatically. Mimo has been flower farming since 1994, and Miranda started farming in 2002. Enjoy an informative and lively presentation from this dynamic duo.

Poppy Davis teaches and advises on agricultural business and policy issues affecting family-scale farms and ranchers and community interests in healthy food and farming systems. She regularly provides formal and informal training and technical assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers on a variety of agricultural business issues including business formation, land tenure, credit, cash flow, taxation, legal liability, including regulatory compliance, and marketing. She is adjunct faculty at the University of Arkansas Law School teaching a course in agricultural taxation. Recent projects include providing workshops and technical assistance under the University of California at Berkeley's BFRDP project "Growing Roots", developing and presenting a special curriculum on food safety and inventory accounting for niche meat producers at the NC Choices Women in Meat Conference (funded by the Wallace Center), and ongoing affiliations with the University of California at Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems Farm Apprentice Program, the Center for Land Based Learning's California Farm Academy, The National Farmers Union Beginning Farmer Institute, and California Farm Link. She worked eight years at the USDA from 2004-2011, most recently as the National Program Leader for Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers. Previously she was a California CPA with an emphasis in agricultural enterprises and non-profits. She holds a Juris Doctor from Drake University Law School, a Masters in Journalism from Georgetown, and a BS in Agricultural Economics from the University of California at Davis.

Alex Hitt has been farming outside of Chapel Hill, North Carolina for 36 years with his wife Betsy. An extremely diversified operation, they produce cut flowers, small fruits, and vegetables. The majority of their income is from a two day a week farmers' market and the rest in direct sales to a number of restaurants. They have also marketed crops by pick-your-own and roadside stands, and to grocery stores, florists, and floral wholesalers. They have both been full time on the farm since 1990 and make their entire living off of 2 ½ acres in production. Alex graduated from Utah State University with a bachelor's degree in soils. He is on the Board of Advisors for the Center for Environmental Farming Systems in Goldsboro, North Carolina. He is also the Board Chair of the Rural Advancement Foundation International—USA. Alex is the past Chair of the Administrative Council of the Southern Region on the USDA's Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education program. Betsy and Alex were named 1995 Small Farmers of the Year by N.C. State A & T Univ.; 1995 Farm Stewards of the Year by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association; and in 2006 awarded the Patrick Madden Award for Sustainable Agriculture. In 2008 they were inducted as Fellows in the Fellowship of Southern Farmers, Artisans, and Chefs. Peregrine Farm was included in the National Academy of Sciences report "Toward Sustainable Agricultural Systems in the 21st Century" in 2010.

Mark Your Calendar for these 2018 ASCFG Events!

February 19-20
Growers' School
The Hotel at Oberlin, Oberlin, Ohio

The traditional Growers' School, with sessions addressing the very basics of cut flower production, handling, and marketing. Come prepared with all your beginners' questions!

March 12-13
Seasoned Growers Meeting
Chateau Le Moyne, New Orleans, Louisiana

You've created a successful cut flower business: you know what varieties grow best for you; you have a handle on what your customers want - you're all set, right? What about the next stage? Are you considering expanding your company, or downsizing it? Are you building increased equity in your business each year, or just getting by? Might you be handing off your farm to family members or long-time employees in the coming years? What's the plan for your farm when you're done farming? Questions like these, and many more, will be answered at the ASCFG's first-ever meeting for seasoned growers. The two-day event will be an intimate affair, strictly limited to only 50 attendees, and concentrating on topics relevant to established cut flower growers. Our speakers will present in-depth sessions, and plenty of time for group discussion will be available.

September 24-26
National Conference and 30th Anniversary Bash
North Raleigh Hilton/Midtown
Raleigh, North Carolina

This celebration will include it all: an on-farm Growers' School, thanks to Sassafras Fork Farm, two more days of speaker sessions, vendor displays, and limitless networking with growers from across the country.

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From the DIRECTOR

Taking the Time to Do it Right

Judy M. Laushman

In an issue packed with a wide range of topics and news, I hope you take the time to read and digest Gay Smith's story on page 13. It's a follow-up piece to an informal survey of floral industry members she originally conducted for us three years ago.

While it is admittedly an unscientific review, and includes only a small sample size, it is startling to read even a few comments like "…many local growers are weak with their postharvest handling, so longevity is often inconsistent." and "I always was pushing for growers to adhere postharvest best practices. Some viewed it as an unnecessary expense."

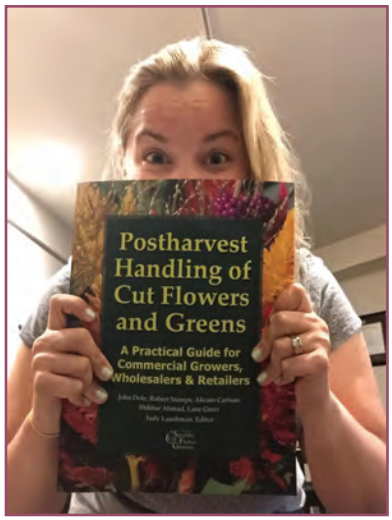
It is hoped that these references aren't regarding ASCFG members or their products, but if the perception is that *any* locally-grown flowers aren't processed with the absolute professionalism they require, the assumption that they are *all* of lower quality can quickly spread, and reverse the footholds that are being made in the floral industry. One of the most important planks in the local flowers platform is the unparalleled freshness and quality of our products; any examples that illustrate otherwise may weaken this structure.

Whether you're facing competition for the consumer dollar from imported and commodity products at the florist or grocery store that carries your flowers, or from a fellow farmers' market vendor selling five-dollar bunches of sunflowers in mayonnaise jars, it's up to you to lead the pack by ensuring that your flowers are truly superior.

Clearly our work is cut out for all of us, and we all must continue to not only promote locally-grown cut flowers, but be sure they are always of the highest quality. If you're unsure of the protocols for any of your crops, chances are you'll find the answers in *Postharvest Handling of Cut Flowers and Greens*, which was written specifically for growers like you. Order your copy now, and spend some of the off-season weeks researching the optimal handling procedures for the flowers and foliage you grow.

Developing, maintaining, and continuing to nourish better relationships with your own retail or wholesale florist, supermarket buyer, farmers' market customers, and wedding clients, can go a long way to strengthen the chain of information.

Recommended by three out of three experts!



Order at www.ascfg.org or call (440) 774-2887!

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Thank you to these lifetime members:

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